

Would You Rather... Five

All dressed up and now what?

Did I tell you how 2008 turned out?

We only bred the cattle and hogs, skipping the horses entirely when they came into estrous. We had two very unhappy stallions. All three children were shooting the M1As and shotguns. The length of pull was a minor problem for Sara, but she would grow into it. Later in the year, we pulled out the HK-416s and allowed the kids to shoot them in semi-auto only. Our quiet one, Dean, figured out that there was one more position and let loose with a short burst of full-auto.

“Dean, please only use semi-auto for now. You have to learn to shoot the weapon before you tryout all of the features.”

He didn't reply. He merely switched the rifle back to semi-auto and continued to practice. All three of them were awestruck when they realized that the rifles included full-auto. We were shooting some frangible practice ammo we'd picked up for situations like these.

The November elections didn't turn out the way I had hoped. We had a young, well-spoken black man up against an aging Vietnam Hero with a female running mate. It wasn't even close, darn it. The new President elect had campaigned on a platform of change and after eight years of Junior, the nation was ready for change.

We got change all right; he was ultra-liberal and had an agenda that promised a lot of change, all towards increased socialism. We had Democrats in the House, Senate and White House. His agenda seemed to only have a single basis, spend, spend and spend. It didn't take long for me to decide I didn't like the man; I listened to his inaugural address. John and Ruth were at our place listening too and I could hear John muttering under his breath.

“That man is trouble with a capital T. If he has his way, he'll spend us into the poor house. Unemployment is out of control and you watch... the CPI is going to fall.”

It was a pretty good guess as it turned out. The year-over-year declines in March and April were the first since 1955. In other words, the CPI fell 0.7. I felt badly about that since John and June had invested their excess funds in TIPS.

The new scope mounted on the rifles by clamping on the outside of the rails. After we had them both sighted in, we experimented between the daylight scopes and night scopes checking for return to zero. These were good scopes and the mounts were solid, return to zero wouldn't be a problem if we took good care of the equipment. The Raptors were in foam lined cases and I'd just use those cases for both scopes. One would be on the rifle and one in the case. We stocked up on AA batteries.

The remainder of the year 2009 wasn't much better than the previous. Unemployment rose and the national debt rose. A major bushfire broke out in Australia, killing 73, injuring 500 and leaving ~7,500 homeless. A Russian and a US satellite collided creating a bunch of space junk. The terrorist attacks around the world continued. It's getting hard to keep track of them.

An earthquake occurred in Italy, killing ~200 and injuring 1,500+. North Korea tested its second nuke. It wasn't large although much larger than the first test. The yield was between 2 and 6kT. Taiwan was hit by a major typhoon killing ~500. There was another earthquake in the Pacific near Samoa killing 189+ and the following day, a quake occurred near Sumatra, killing 1,000+ in Indonesia. There is H1N1 to worry about now.

During 2010, Mona and I finally bought a car. Very old with low mileage. This may have actually belonged to a little old lady who only drove it to church like the salesman claimed. The interior was immaculate and the vehicle had been garaged. She must have skipped church in the winter, there was no rust. She had faithfully kept the car up, getting it washed and waxed. The oil was changed every three months whether she drove it or not. It was a 1969 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham four door sedan.

Was it a collector's item? The salesman seemed to think so and wanted double the original selling price and wouldn't budge. It was an elegant car and Mona could dress up and ride in comfort. She'd been nagging about going back to that restaurant in Denver and showing off her black pearls for quite some time. On the trip down, we started off easy and eventually blew some of the carbon out. I decided on the way back to get the engine rebuilt and get back the original power the engine once had. Parts were a bit of a problem but the mechanic finally found what he needed.

"That's more like it."

"Shouldn't you be breaking the engine in?"

"I am."

"You're going too fast."

"If you want the engine to be powerful and hard running, you use the power and run it hard. I took it easy for the first 500. Hang on; let's see what she'll do."

This year wasn't without problems. There were earthquakes. Haiti, 230,000 dead, Chile creating a tsunami killing ~500, China with 2,000+ dead and 10,000+ injured. The Deepwater Horizon exploded in the Gulf of Mexico killing 11 and created the largest oil slick in history. Nine Turkish activists are killed when Israel intercepted a flotilla trying to break the Gaza Blockade. Monsoon rains in Pakistan caused floods killing 1,600+.

Another earthquake off Sumatra killed 400+ with hundreds missing. A volcano on Java erupted, killing 240+. A stampede in Cambodia killed 347. The details don't seem to be important any longer, just what happened and how many died.

A South Korean naval vessel was sunk killing 46. A panel concluded North Korea was responsible. And, how could I forget, Obama signed the new Healthcare Law on Mona and Sara's birthday. Health insurance premiums for our small operation had been an ongoing source of concern. We didn't see where the new law would offer us much benefit.

Paul is seventeen, Dean fifteen and Sara thirteen. Mona and I are the same age, forty-one. Paul will be a senior this year and would enter college the following year. John and June assure us that they'll cover the tab for all three of their grandchildren. Frankly, that was a bit of a relief. All three are talking college to some degree and with the economy in its present state, we weren't sure if we could afford it.

John had gotten each person three sets of MultiCam in the beginning. And then, as the children had grown, added more where necessary. Initially, he couldn't find warm outerwear in MultiCam. Just about everything else was available including packs, load bearing equipment and so forth. As another company licensed the pattern and began to produce products using the pattern, it was added.

When Paul graduated from high school in 2011, he got a new vehicle as a graduation gift from his Grandparents, a Jeep. It was a 2010 Wrangler that had been special ordered and included a Cummins 4BT diesel engine and had a manual transmission. It was a rag top model with four wheel drive. There was a metal storage box containing 'spare parts'.

"You're going to need a good vehicle this fall when you go to college. We decided on this model and got it with a diesel. Jeep has a diesel but I had the dealer replace the factory diesel with a non-electronic diesel. There are replacement parts in that box in the back, just in case."

"Just in case what, Grandpa?"

"Just in case almost anything including but not limited to EMP."

Dean should have been happy for Paul. He had a rather sour look on his face. He didn't say anything as was his wont. I could almost hear the gears grinding though. He liked the vehicle but wouldn't get one until he graduated from high school in two years. Sara wouldn't get one until she graduated from high school in four years. Would Chrysler be around in two/four years? Would they still be making Jeeps in two/four years?

"Dean looks a little unhappy Alan."

"I expect he's wondering if he'll get a similar graduation gift when he graduates."

“I can guarantee it.”

“Yeah right. Will Chrysler be around in two years or even four? Will they still make the same model? That’s just the way he thinks.”

“I said I could guarantee it. That applies to Sara too.”

“Un-uh, you couldn’t have bought three identical Jeeps.”

“Not identical, each is a different color.”

“You didn’t?”

“I had the same thought as you voiced and Dean apparently is thinking. June and I talked it over and decided that there was only one way to guarantee we could treat all three the same. The other two are up on stands in my new garage and all have the same engine replacement.”

“When did you build a new garage?”

“When we ordered the three Jeeps. It wasn’t much, just a simple three car garage with propane heat, electricity and cold water. A couple of guys that worked for me poured a slab, framed it up, added siding and insulation. There’s a double door and a single door. The single door opens into my new workshop. I needed a hobby, sitting around was driving me crazy.”

“What kind of hobby?”

“Machining. I have a toolroom lathe, a mill and a drill press. They’re not new but do what I want. I learned my machining long before they had these fancy computer controlled lathes.”

“What are you working on?”

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“What was that all about?”

“To guarantee each of the children got the exact same vehicle your folks bought three. Your Dad said they’re identical except for color.”

“They cost over twenty thousand!”

“I knew they were expensive, but twenty thousand for a Jeep?”

“The CPI hasn’t gone down every month.”

“True. He said they have them stored in a new three stall garage he had built. He’s using the third stall as a machine shop. I had an offer on some of our horses. I told the guy I had to think about it. We’ve been pricing them around \$3,500 and he offered \$3,000, take it or leave it.”

“How many does he want?”

“Twelve.”

A question was recently posted on Frugal’s, asking about flashlights. I almost replied, but chose not to. All of our HK-416s and M1As have Surefire gun lights. Each of us has a Maglite Solitaire, a Maglite double AA cell and a six D cell flashlight.

There are Ray-O-Vac lanterns on each floor of the dome, including the basement. There is also one on each floor of the house, including the basement. There are none in the shelter although there were spare batteries, bulbs and lenses. The spare lenses came out of lanterns that had been damaged beyond use.

After much thought, I accepted the guy’s offer. Let him feed them; we need a little money for a shopping trip to Denver. We took off for Denver the next day and ordered a HK upper to replace the upper on our AR-15. Whether or not we end up with our goal remains to be seen. We can still only fight WW 3-6. And, no, we don’t have any hand grenades, smoke grenades or LAW rockets. But we know where to go if we need them, Ft. Carson.

I searched the web using yahoo with the subject ‘smoke grenades for sale’. I found a website but they were out of the ALS smoke grenades. They did have 20 packs of flares and I bought two. I kept searching and hit upon the US Cavalry which is the online store associated with Global Security. They had the smaller ALS smoke grenade, not the M-18. Plus, they only sold to LEOs and military.

We were able to purchase some very illegal M-80s. We made the guy light one to make sure we weren’t being sold a class C firework. These were the real McCoy and a buck apiece. We figured they were probably stolen because real M-80s are still manufactured on a limited basis. We had our hand grenades, as it were.

We intended to spend the remainder of 2011 concentrating solely on the ranch. I quit checking the news because it was depressing. Mona agreed with me and said if it were really important, either her Mom or Dad would call. We bought five Oregon Scientific model WR602 weather radios with SAME, one for each family member to carry and 2 model WR608s for the house and shelter.

A Representative was shot in the head in Tucson, Arizona this past January eighth. She survived and was moved to Houston to for rehabilitation. Her husband, Mark Kelly, is

the Commander of STS-134, Endeavor. It's the final shuttle mission. He had flown on three previous missions.

The House voted to repeal National Healthcare early in 2011. The Senate didn't agree, hence we still had National Healthcare. There's hope, though, a federal judge in Florida ruled the law unconstitutional. There was all kind of scrambling on Capitol Hill.

Because of the Tucson shooting, a new Assault Weapons Ban was introduced in both the House and Senate. The House bill never made it out of Committee, but the Senate passed their bill by a single vote and sent it to the House, where it died. John mentioned an article that he'd read. The writer had claimed that the NRA had a major campaign to raise money in case the bill passed.

"Alan, have you read TOMs new story?"

"Haven't had time. What's the title?"

"The Trials of George Thomas'. It's about someone killing President Obama and Joe Biden ending up in charge."

"That's a Disaster story, not Patriot Fiction."

"In a way you're right. There were riots all over the country. I'd better not spoil the story for you."

"Come on, don't leave me hanging."

"Go read it and you won't be hanging. It had a different ending than most of his stories."

"What his heroes don't have M1As?"

"No, they have M1As. He wouldn't write a story without M1As in it. They all have Tac-50s too."

"How many is they?"

"Five; all former Boeing employees who built the Block III Apaches. The wives are as blood thirsty as the guys."

"I'll read it first chance I get."

"While you're at it, Jerry has a new story on titled 'Pole Shift'. It's as good or better. They've sure increased the number of authors. Kathy in Florida is very good and so is Paradox. Grand seems to be dividing his time between 'Lucky' and 'Second Chance'. There are several new writers."

"I read 'Lucky' until he dropped it for 'Second Chance'. Whatever happened to his sequel to 'By Law'?"

"Don't know; he dropped it to work on other stories. You squared away on your firearms?"

"Yep."

"Oh, I found a source for those M18s."

"Not that guy in Texas?"

"Someone else entirely. Interested?"

"How much?"

"Forty each and they're sold in pairs."

"These are the long burning smoke grenades made by ALS?"

"Yep."

"What colors are available?"

"All colors. How many and what color?"

"I think 2 dozen white smoke and a dozen each of green and red smoke."

"I thought you were never in the military."

"I wasn't, but I can read. White is primarily for screening, green is for a cold LZ and red is for a hot LZ. However, they can be used for screening in a pinch."

"It's going to run you two grand with shipping."

"We have quite a bit of money left from that horse sale. By the way, I bought an HK-416 upper for my AR-15."

"I almost forgot. Did you know that China is dumping the US debt they own?"

"Hadn't heard that. That's a big deal?"

"It could prove to be a very big deal."

"Think we need to do anything?"

“Are your stores up to date?”

“We have a few holes that don’t amount to much.”

“How many of the gas masks, Tyvek suits, boots, gloves, tape and spare CBRN filters do you do you have?”

“None.”

“That’s a big hole. Try Approved Gas Masks in San Diego. Do you have KI or KIO₃?”

“Not that I know of. What is it?”

“Pills you take to prevent a buildup of radioactive iodine in your thyroid. Since we have so many extra, I bring over five complete outfits and the pills. See you in about ten minutes.”

“Something bothering you?”

“We don’t have gas masks and the associated equipment.”

“Mom and Dad have plenty. I’m sure they will give us some.”

“That’s what he said. Expect a visit from your folks in about ten minutes.”

“We should get a large Rubbermaid Action Packer and pack up a set of supplies for Paul. We should also get jerry cans and fill them with stabilized diesel.”

“His fuel tank holds enough to get home.”

“I don’t care. We should actually add a reserve tank and the jerry Cans.”

“Well let’s get the tote and get that filled. Metal jerry cans are expensive.”

“So, buy Blitz. He’ll only need four.”

“No, it’s metal or nothing. Considering what we’ve spent on non-essentials, we might as well do it up right. After your folks leave, we’ll go shopping. Do you know where to get the totes?”

“Wal-Mart.”

We bought three 48 gallon Action Packers since there were three Jeeps. The steel 5 gallon diesel cans were a different matter. After Wal-Mart we climbed into the pickup and headed to Denver. We figured we might as well check Costco and Sam’s Club

while we were there. We got three cargo carriers that mounted on the hitch receivers and a dozen cans.

We added three six-packs of identically keyed locks. Two would lock the fuel cans on the cargo carrier, one would lock the Action Packer, one would lock the cargo carrier to the hitch receiver pin, one would lock the chain holding the tote in place with the last being a spare.

“What are we going to put in the totes?”

“I thought we’d put in some of the Mountain House pouches, a case of the water pouches, a 3 pack of strike anywhere matches in a seal-a-meal bag, three sets of underwear, a set of MultiCams, a Leatherman, knives, a coil of paracord, a roll of duct tape and their MultiCam backpacks as a start.”

“Leave room for those ‘spare parts’ John bought.”

“I planned to. Since Paul took his M1A, how about the suppressor?”

“Let’s think about that before we include it. It probably wouldn’t hurt to add a battle pack or two of 7.62, two boxes of Gold Dot and a box each of slugs and 00 buck.”

“Where is he keeping his firearms?”

“He rented a locker in one of those self-storage places. You know the policy about firearms on campus.”

“Yes, but I don’t agree with it.”

“Too many shootings on college campuses, Mona. You said knives? That’s something else we’ve overlooked.”

“You over looked. I bought several, a very long time ago, and they’re in the storage room.”

“What kind?”

“I got Gerber Mark IIs, Cold Steel San Mai Trail Masters and Buck Folding Hunters.”

“Whetstones?”

“Five sets of Arkansas stones. Each set has numbers 2, 4 and a 6 plus a small bottle of honing oil.”

“Want to include the PPE that your folks brought over?”

“If there’s room.”

“We’ll set up all three of the totes and give Paul his when he comes home for the Holidays.”

What else had I overlooked or forgotten to get? I’m sure it will come to me when we need it and don’t have it. That was an antithesis of the way we’d been doing things since Paul brought up prepping and we got involved. I tried comparing our state of preparedness with the fiction stories. With few exceptions, we were probably better prepared than many of the characters in the stories.

I was no Thomas Dayfield with forty million to spread around, for sure. Dayfield’s parents had helped him via the inheritance he got. Mona’s parents had helped us but they couldn’t be as rich as Thomas. Could they? All she ever said was, “You have no idea how much they have in total.”

We considered the PPE as loaners and ordered 10 sets of everything from Approved Gas Masks in San Diego. When ours came in, we returned theirs and explained that we’d purchased our own. Perhaps there was something to their idea of giving us twenty grand a year. If they had a lot of money, they’d avoid some inheritance tax.

I wondered how they were going to account for the vehicles since the individual limit was ten grand. Write it off over a six year period? The kids were spaced two years apart. That’s why we have a bookkeeper. She does the payroll, payroll taxes, the accounting and prepares the tax returns. We just sign on the line and sign the check made out to her.

My weather radio went off announcing a tornado warning for Morgan, Logan and Sedgwick counties. The tornado was on the ground in Morgan county and moving rapidly to the northeast. And, wouldn’t you know it, I was combining corn. Bob had picked up a wagon load of corn and was halfway to the house. We had never purchased the Motorola CP 200s or CM 300s John had recommended. The vehicles had CBs, but they were all up at the house.

Since I could run faster than the combine moved, I shut it down and took off on foot. There was a nasty looking bank of black clouds to the southwest. I couldn’t see a funnel cloud. I must have been more out of shape than I thought, halfway to the house I was huffing and puffing trying to get my breath. Closer to the house, I saw the rotating cloud start down from the cell.

The last of the livestock were being herded into the dome by Harry and Harry Jr. I saw them drop the door as the cloud came closer and seemed to grow in size. I finally made it into the house and quickly moved to the basement. The cabinet was rolled aside showing the outer blast door. It was open a crack so I knew someone had made to the shelter. I swung the heavy sucker open just enough to slip through and pulled it closed behind me while I listened to the freight train sound of the tornado. I moved the lever

locking the door and went down the slope to the shelter. Mona, Maria and Bob were in the shelter.

“Awful late in the season for a tornado, isn’t it?”

“Be that as it may, it was big and very close.”

“The livestock?”

“Harry and Harry Jr. had them in the dome and were closing the door. This is another case where we didn’t take advice when it was offered.”

“What do you mean? Between the shelter and dome everyone and everything was protected.”

“Yes and I had my radio with me and heard the tornado warning. They usually put out a watch before a warning.”

“They did.”

“I didn’t hear it. That’s what I meant by not taking good advice when it was offered. Your father strongly suggested we buy and license business band radios and install one in every vehicle, the combine and the tractor. The ranch is a business and we’d qualify for a license. I added it up and we’d need a mobile in the shelter and the house to act as base stations. Then we’d need a mobile for each pickup and the Caddy.

“Take those five and you add two more for the combine and tractor. We should probably put them in each of Harry and Maria’s vehicle plus their youngsters so make it ten. No, make it thirteen, include our three too. That’s just the CM 300s. We’d need a base station antenna on a tower plus twenty-six portables.”

“Twenty-six? There are the five of us, and five of Harry’s family including Crystal.”

“One for your mother and one for your father, just in case. I priced them. The 45 watt CM 300 32 channel VHF radio is \$360. The 5 watt CP 200 16 channel VHF radio is around \$280. We’d need four six-radio charging stands at \$450 each. Add on 12 headsets with boom mikes, another \$50 each. Spare batteries are another \$50 each. Power supplies are around \$470 each. The base station antenna and tower won’t be cheap. Do you see why I didn’t buy them?”

“That’s about twelve thousand dollars without the tower and antenna.”

“Right. Monopoles used for wind turbines start at \$3,600 for a 50’ and go up to around \$12,650 for a 100’.”

“You don’t have to include my parents because they have the radios.”

“Low band, VHF or UHF?”

“I don’t know.”

A 45 watt mobile VHF radio communicating with a base station antenna in flat country has a good range. The radios I had in mind used a frequency range of 146-174 MHz. Had it been an amateur band, it would have been somewhere slightly above the 2 meter band.

It actually started about 1 MHz below the top of the two meter band and stopped well below the 1.25 meter band. The portables had short antennas and a maximum of 5 watts of output making communications between the portables much shorter. A portable could pick up a mobile or base station but the reverse wasn’t always true.

The tornado missed the homestead by several hundred yards. We lost a small section of the wooden fence that made up the newer lane. Harry and his sons got on the repairs immediately so we could let the horses out. The wire fence, having little surface area, didn’t seem to be damaged.

After checking the bank account, I called a radio dealer in Denver and told him exactly what I wanted for radios and mobile antennas. I explained that I’d found an online source but preferred to keep it local if he’d match their prices. It didn’t take him long to decide when he added up the total.

Installation would be a separate charge but he’d give us a discount. When I suggested the wind turbine monopole, he wasn’t interested but agreed to mount the antenna and run the coax, for a fee. I called Event Horizon Solar and got a quote on a 70’ Skystream monopole. They wanted around \$6,500 plus shipping. It was actually less expensive than the 60’ because the 60’ was priced higher and a tilt up model and you had to buy a lift kit for \$1,250 plus shipping.

We were a day late but not the dollar short. John had the VHF CM-300 and CP-200 with 4 channels. We’d have channels leftover on our radios and we could use four of our frequencies programmed to his frequencies. The radios weren’t crystal controlled and could be programmed with software, for a nominal charge for the software and cable.

Our bookkeeper admonished me to watch the spending. Our bank balance was lower than she liked and she always wanted money to cover contingencies. We weren’t broke or close to it. More like slightly bent until we sold some grain and livestock.

I finally looked in the faraday cabinet in the shelter and examined the radios. There were two, an all band scanning receiver and a Kenwood TS-2000 with power supply, headphone and a desk microphone. Sure had a lot of knobs and dials on it. John was an Extra Class while Mona and I only had General Class licenses and had never used the Kenwood. She was generally familiar with John’s Yaesu equipment, not Kenwood.

Looking over the radio table, I found the grounding bar and an outlet marked 30 amps. I figured it was for the power supply. The duplex was a NEMA 5-30 and probably wired with AWG 10 or 8. There was a note taped to the inside of the cabinet door which said, "Vertical antenna and cable in the store room on shelf". Good thing I looked. There was also a CB base station antenna labeled, "Starduster". It appeared we'd need two or three standoffs and Alpha Delta lightning arresters.

Would You Rather... Six

Silent Running (On Dangerous Ground)

*Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?*

*Take the children and yourself
And hide out in the cellar
By now the fighting will be close at hand
Don't believe the church and state
And everything they tell you
Believe in me, I'm with the high command
Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?
Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?*

*There's a gun and ammunition
Just inside the doorway
Use it only in emergency
Better you should pray to God
The Father and the Spirit
Will guide you and protect from up here*

*Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?
Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?*

*Swear allegiance to the flag
Whatever flag they offer
Never hint at what you really feel
Teach the children quietly
For some day sons and daughters
Will rise up and fight while we stood still*

*Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?
Can you hear me, can you hear me running?
Can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?*

*Can you hear me running (can you hear me calling you?)
(Can you hear me) hear me calling you?
(Can you hear me running) hear me running babe?
(Can you hear me running) hear me running?*

Calling you, calling you
Mike and the Mechanics

I borrowed that from TOM's story titled 'Silent Running'.

The year 2012 was a Presidential Election year. John McCain wasn't running and it was like, 'Sarah who'? The GOP had a so-so candidate and while the Tea Party didn't endorse him, they went out of their way to campaign against Obama.

Not only were the airwaves filled with political sparring, someone had dug up the Mayan calendar and were worrying about Planet X, Nibiru. The discovery by Lowell of the eccentricities in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune could be explained by the former planet Pluto. He, too, was proven wrong. The only worse disaster I can think of is Obama being reelected with Joe Biden as Vice President. What? You think they're best thing going? Let me remind you, it only takes one rotten apple to spoil a barrel.

North Korea's third nuclear test was much different from the previous two. This time, they achieved 100kT yield with what the experts were calling a fission-fusion-fission bomb aka hydrogen bomb. The power of a bomb of this nature comes from the fission. The presence of some form of hydrogen isotope produces a vast increase in neutrons causing the fission to be more complete. At least that's what I understood when I read about it on Wiki. North Korea also tested an ICBM, successfully. I suppose everyone gets lucky. I also suspect they had outside help. It apparently hit the target some 12 thousand clicks (~7,500 miles) downrange.

Two months and no more tornadoes later, we had our new 70' monopole with the CB antenna on one standoff and business band antenna on the second standoff and the ham band vertical on the third standoff. The installer cautioned that the best practice was to replace the coaxial cables every three years. The top held a wind turbine, an experiment. It was a medium turbine with about 10kw of output in the form of 48vdc.

The direct current fed a single battery bank consisting of twenty-four deep cycle 2.2 volt submarines batteries wired in series. There was a charge controller between the turbine and batteries and an inverter behind the batteries. The wind turbine hadn't been overly expensive; it was the ancillary equipment and monopole that had been the big expense.

We licensed four channels on the business radios and programmed channels 1-4 for our frequencies. Channels 13-16 were programmed with the channels John and June had licensed. He'd done well when he'd sold the construction company to his business manager, getting \$3.4 million for the assets and \$0.6 million for Goodwill.

We allayed the bookkeeper's fears when we sold just short of 500 hogs. That covered the radios, antenna, installation, the wind turbine system and padded the bank account. The ranch now had a value of about \$1.3 million based on current selling prices.

The politics during the campaign had been downright nasty. Obama was being blamed for everything wrong with the US including the fall influenza that began to steal some headlines.

The pre-election polls projected the candidates to be even, given the polling error rate of $\pm 3\%$. On November 6th the initial results, unlike 2008, were too close to call. It came down to the Florida and Ohio's vote counts. The certified results delivered a day before the deadline gave the GOP Control of the White House by a 1.9% vote margin. The Electoral margin wasn't nearly that close, although it was divided.

For two years, the GOP had tried and failed to repeal National Healthcare. The outcome of the Florida federal district court case had been reviewed by the appeals court and upheld. The case was now before SCOTUS which hadn't heard oral arguments, yet. The House had managed to block more gun control, voting along party lines.

Paul's Jeep had been tan. John had shown us the other two. Dean's was green and Sara's cherry red. Paul was attending College in Fort Collins at Colorado State University majoring in Animal Science. Dean was one semester away from high school graduation and intended to attend the same University and major in Agronomy.

Fort Collins was nearly due west of Sterling. It is on state route 14 at a distance of ~100 miles. Paul usually took about 2 hours to make the drive. We equipped the Jeep with the Action Packer, carrier and fuel cans. The suppressor wasn't included in the tote. The tote was held in place with a cable and padlocked shut. Paul had three firearms with him, the Loaded, the 590A1 and the Taurus. Yes, we bought three more; the Express Combos were hunting guns.

"Alan, is all of your M1A ammo 168gr?"

"No John, we have many more rounds of 147gr surplus FMJ ball ammo. Why do you ask?"

"Have you ever tried a heavier bullet weight like 178gr?"

"Nope. The 168gr seems to do a good job for us."

"But, the heavier the bullet, the greater the range. Here're two boxes of the 178gr Superformance BTHP Match. Give it a try and let me know what you think."

Mona and I tried it. The groups at 800 meters were marginally smaller.

"What do you think, sweetheart?"

"We have a lot of the 168gr. Maybe buy the 178gr as you shoot up the 168gr? The Super Match is your rifle so it's up to you."

“I don’t think so. We have a lot of the 168gr and I’d prefer to stay with a known commodity.”

Listen to me...describing Hornady A-MAX Match as a commodity. For what it costs per round, maybe it is a commodity. A bushel of corn would buy 4+ rounds. We’d have to buy the Hornady in Denver and they had a high sales tax, almost 8%.

I didn’t get the chance to get to Denver and probably won’t ever again. We didn’t have a tornado, or an earthquake, or an aquifer subsiding, or the government running amok, at least not at first. More than fifty years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, which almost resulted in a nuclear war, e.g. WW III, we had WW III. It started when Pakistan launched on India. The Pakistanis had been expanding their complement of nuclear weapons in recent years and working on their missiles to increase the range and accuracy.

Undoubtedly the intelligence agencies knew, or should have known. They had to know about the missile tests because every missile launch anywhere on the planet is tracked by our satellites and studied by NORAD. There is simply no way they could have not known. All the previous launches had been away from land masses. These launches were pointed to the southeast, east and northeast.

India no doubt saw them coming and responded in kind. China no doubt saw them coming and responded in kind. That’s pure speculation on my part. A single missile was launched from a ship near the east coast of the US and the missile arced up to about 400km over the center of the US, and detonated. In another part of the world, a single missile launched off the coast of Finland arced up about 400km over Russia and detonated to the east of Moscow. Russia’s BMD system failed to work and Russia fell into the dark, too.

All hell broke loose. Our weather radios squealed and died just as a broadcast was initiated. Our lights went out, momentarily (~10 seconds) and the generator kicked in. Well, Merry Christmas to you too, whoever you are. Paul and Dean were home from school.

We were hosting John and June and the Hanson’s. I was just ready to slice into the 24 pound turkey that had been cooked to a turn. It was a thing to behold. As was customary, neither boy went anywhere without their armory close to hand. Their firearms were locked up in the nearly overloaded gun safe in the storage room.

“John, I do believe it’s time.”

“Time for what?”

“To bend over and kiss your butt goodbye.”

“Nonsense. Everyone grab a dish and haul it to the shelter. Come back and haul what we didn’t take the first time and Mona, you start emptying the ‘fridge. June, would you lend a hand?”

“Take the children and yourself and hide out in the cellar

“Gather the Hanson’s firearms and ammo. I’ll close up the dome and get the air systems running. Harry, could you give me a hand?”

“Sure boss, I’ll drop my first load and head for the tunnel.”

“Good, I got the turkey.”

“Alan, is it going to be all right?”

“I sure hope so Mona; we’ve had almost 25 years of practicing.”

Within fifteen minutes, the food was in the shelter. Five minutes later the firearms were secure and Harry and I were on our way back from the dome. The dome had two entrances and hay was piled on pallets near each door. It was the work of only moments to move the hay blocking the entrances. Since we’d sealed the dome from the outside, we couldn’t access the tunnel to return to the shelter.

As Harry and I entered the house, the sun exploded over Denver and a second sun exploded further south around Colorado Springs. We were pretty much out of the radius of the blast wave from Denver yet still hurried to get into the shelter and button it up.

“Oh no. We didn’t get clothes.”

“Maria, Mona has something in nearly every size; she can find you some clothes in the storeroom.”

“What about the boys and me?”

“Not a problem Harry, we have some of everything.”

“Now what?”

“I’m all for eating Christmas dinner before the food gets cold or hot as the case may be. John, will you do the honors?”

“Separate the drumsticks and thighs and pull the meat?”

“That would be best. There a lot more white meat than dark. Leave the wings whole and people can fight over them.”

It was an outstanding meal with everything on the table was from the ranch, except for two or three items. The cranberries being the obvious nonfarm item. The dressing was made from home baked bread and spiced with our onions and celery from the store.

There was pistachio salad with Cool Whip, pineapple, coconut and marshmallows. There were acorn squash, butternut squash and the traditional green bean casserole. We also had candied sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes and turkey gravy to drown the turkey, dressing and potatoes in. Should anyone have room, there were pumpkin and dutch apple pies.

Before John could finish slicing the turkey, the floor shook. He looked up and asked, "Denver?"

"Most likely. Could you get the bird sliced up, please? I skipped breakfast."

"Well, excuse me. It's not every day we have WW III."

"They'll call the next one WW IV and unless we run out of ammo or the guns all break, we won't be fighting with sticks and stones."

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"Your tanks topped off?"

"Right after harvest. We haven't used a lot of fuel so the kerosene is full and the gas tank probably has 3,800. Diesel maybe a shade over 39,500."

"No backup generator?"

Just the primary generator and the wind powered battery bank. It should carry us for a long time. Do we need to go lock down your place?"

"That's what you get for not following the news more closely. Been keeping my eye on the Pakistani build up. It just didn't seem right for them to more than double the number of weapons in such a short time. Don't you think you should get the AMP 200 and CD V-717 hooked up?"

"Want me to hook up a cheap radio to the CB antenna?"

"Got more?"

"Yep."

"Go ahead."

I completed the task and sat down in my old recliner to rest my eyes.

"Alan? ALAN?"

“Oh I must have dozed off. What?”

“Cows are milked and the livestock fed. They’re fidgety so we’re going to have to calm them from time to time.”

“Are we getting radiation yet?”

“Have been for over an hour,” John answered. “Found your log and been noting the reading every 15 minutes. It was Denver, all right. The wind’s southwesterly running about 12 knots. That’s fourteen mph for you landlubbers. It started to hit around nine hours after the floor shook. I obviously hooked up your weather station. Oregon Scientific, huh?”

“What time is it?”

“Close to midnight.”

“You should have wakened me.”

“Tried. You were dead to the world with a smile on your face.”

“What’s there to smile about?”

“Only that you were prepared and everyone was here when it happened.”

“I can buy that. It’s been a long road.”

“Longer for us, nearly 40 years.”

“Mind if I ask you a question that’s none of my business?”

“Might not answer, but if I do, it will be the truth.”

“Just how much have June and you accumulated?”

“You mean money? Of course you mean money. I haven’t counted it in a while; I’m no Silas Marner.”

“Ok.”

“I didn’t answer your question Alan. Let me give it a shot. That big old safe in our storage room? It’s full of gold and silver. The gold is mixed among the four denominations of gold Eagles and some of the silver is two thousand silver Eagles. We acquired more when we sold the business although the price was higher then. Should something happen to me, you’re to move the safe here. I expect you to take care of June until her dying day.

“Being that the world as we knew it probably is gone, there probably wouldn’t be estate taxes anyway. That doesn’t count the cash, but that’s probably worthless. We’ll try to get it spent before everyone realizes that.

“We do need to bring over Sara’s Jeep when we get the chance. If we stay here, we’ll use up our fuel first for transportation and farming. Between us, we have a lot of diesel. That said my generator kicked in about the same time as yours. There’s no telling how much fuel will be left, but probably most of it. The only strikes we’re sure of are Denver and the Springs. The radiation is still climbing but the wind is shifting more westerly. So, who knows how much fallout we’ll end up with?”

[Wind direction is reported based on the direction it’s blowing from.]

We stored the manure spreaders in the barns to minimize the work involved in mucking. They could end up full with the extra piled in a stall, or two. I sincerely hoped the air purifiers could supply enough fresh air for the animals since we had the fall birthing of hogs to contend with.

“What will happen if some idiot tries to break into the shelter?”

“Nothing. Both doors are locked from the inside and I slid the cabinet back in place. Harry, do you have more than one M1A?”

“Nope. Maria and Crystal have Mini-14s. The boys each have POF P-415s with 16½” barrels in 6.8 SPC. We have two twenty gauge pumps and 3 twelve gauge pump Express combos with smoothbore short barrels. Handguns are a mixture of 9mm and .45ACP. Not a lot of ammo, though. We have about 900-1,000 rounds of rifle ammo for each rifle and the handgun ammo is military surplus ball. Shotgun shells are hunting calibers. The case of slugs and case of 00 is Federal.”

“Harry, trust me on this, ammo won’t be a problem except for the 6.8 SPC.”

“I’ve got some,” John interrupted. “It’s in our trade goods.”

That settled, I got a cup of coffee and sat down at the table next to Sara. She’d been crying.

“What’s wrong Sara?”

“I’m not going to graduate high school or go to college. That means I won’t get a Jeep either.”

“The Jeep is in your grandparent’s new garage. The world will be different now and you already possess knowledge and skills that will put you head and shoulders above many college grads. You’ve been raised on ranch slash farm and know horses. You also

know gardening and how to preserve food. You can defend yourself and have the tools to do that. Had you decided on a major?"

"History."

"Knowledge of history is important. It won't put a meal on the table. For the large part, history is merely a guide. *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.* He also said, *only the dead have seen the end of war.*"

"When did he say that?"

"About 100 years ago, give or take."

"Does he have a name?"

"George Santayana. His was a Spaniard who was raised in the US and wrote in English. I can't remember when or where he died (Madrid, 1863 – Rome, 1952, age 88). Dry your eyes and give us a hug. It will work out best in the end."

"I'm impressed Daddy."

"About what?"

"You just proved the point you were trying to make. You didn't go to college did you?"

"Nope. Had a ranch to run and your Aunt Julie to buy out. Didn't have the time. Did your Mom ever tell you about Jeff?"

"The Octopus?"

"She told you."

"It was part of a lesson about making careful choices. Now, I have a question. We have more firearms than a police department. Why?"

"I could say so you have the right tool for the right job. The main reason is simpler; I'm a gun nut."

"Funny. It's going to bad out there, isn't it?"

"It could be. We're not that far from I-76. The city folks depend on just in time delivery for most of their food. There won't be much food and what there is will disappear rapidly. We have livestock and some cereal crops that people will want. We have some CDs containing Patriot Fiction stories including one from Fleataxi and another from Jerry D Young. Fleataxi's contains his stories, TOM's early stories and at least one other, 'Paradise', I think. Read a couple and get a feel for what they think it will be like."

“Fiction? They’re just guessing.”

“Jerry has a list of 139 possible disaster scenarios. The majority of TOM’s are nuclear war scenarios. Fleataxi has a mix.”

“Maybe, if I get bored. Could I have a demonstration please?”

“A demonstration of what?”

“You bending over and kissing your butt goodbye.”

“Don’t be flip. It’s just an expression.”

The wind remained westerly and we received very little fallout. When it was safe, relatively speaking, we hooked the big water pump to the main water line and washed the place down using 1½” fire hoses. It took some time to do the ten acres comprising the homestead. We moved to John and June’s, repeating the process. In Sterling, there were some people out and about. Not many for a town with a population of over 13,000.

When it was safe to do so, John and June returned home and the Hanson’s to their mobile homes. One of the local survivors was a welder and Mona and I commissioned a gate across the entrance to the homestead. Since materials weren’t a problem for the welder, he built it extremely heavy duty...6” pipe. When he had it done, he brought it out and we helped him unload it. We lay it across the driveway and dug post holes where he pointed. Given the limits of our posthole digger, we dug the post holes and centered the pipes in them. We then drove the pipes deeper into the soil and filled the holes with fast setting Quikrete.

We let it set up for a week even though it was hard in 30 minutes. He returned, mounted the gate and we paid him the promised food, enough for three for two months. After he left, we got out a roll of barbed wire and improved the gate with homemade concertina which we attached with rebar tie wire. With the disappearance of wire balers, we’d taken to buying rolls of rebar tie wire a case at a time. It came 20 rolls to the case and in several wire gauges. We chose 14 gauge.

We set a watch on the top of the dome with the rest of us taking turns. There was snow on the ground and we pondered whether or not to try and blade the snow off the frozen ground to eliminate any fallout that might exist on or in the snow. We concluded that we should if we could get a road grader to use for the task.

The grader was the easy part; we got one from the County. We did the pastures first and when we finished, used a CD V-700 to check for residual fallout. There was some, although very little. With that success, we could turn out the livestock and clean up the dome. With one person on the grader and the rest in the barn loading the spreaders, the manure was spread on the fields after the snow was graded off.

We didn't plow in the fall due to limited time. For once, it was fortuitous that we didn't. The cold sucked the heat from the manure and it froze solid. The temperatures seemed to be much lower after the first of the year. No radio station had made it back on the air. The amateur bands were alive with information.

We took a US map and used a highlighter to mark cities hit with nukes. The list included seaports and large MSAs (metropolitan statistical areas). The only military installation struck was Colorado Springs with the Air Force Academy, Peterson AFB, Fort Carson and Cheyenne Mountain. Schriever AFB was about ten miles east of Peterson. Schriever was home of the Space Command which was in charge of the US satellites like GPS. We could only guess about how Schriever fared being so close to the Springs.

All five of our M1As were carried with the Trijicon mounted. My scope was in the Raptor 4X case in a new pocket cut to hold it. The case also included spare AA batteries for the Raptor. The Tac-50 had the day scope mounted but switching to the Raptor 6X only took moments. In addition to the two Glocks, the 590A1 was kept in a rack in the pickup. Our number one priority was to find diesel fuel, followed by gasoline as number two. We first tried going up and down I-76 looking for tankers. We found two, both with mixed loads of 75% diesel and 25% 87 octane unleaded. John and I each took one.

"Did you find enough to refill the tank?"

"Haven't stuck the tank so I don't know."

There was a call on the business band mobile radio being used as a base station. Mona answered the call, turning to me and saying, "It's Daddy and he wants to talk to you."

"Yes John, is something up?"

"Alan, you realize that a major portion of the diesel fuel is in Denver, don't you? Anyway, I've talked to surviving grain farmers who produce biodiesel. They're willing to trade fuel for some of the things you produce on the ranch. They need meat and canned goods. I told them I'd talk it over with you and get back to them. What do you think?"

"Based on what I learned when I looked into biodiesel, the yield can be as high as 127 gallons per acre using rapeseed as the oil source. A guy farming a whole section, minus the homestead, might produce 80,000 gallons per year. Diesel would be a valuable commodity and running our generator at only 25% capacity would use a gallon and a half per hour. At 50% capacity, it would use two point four gallons per hour. There are 365.25 days in an average year and multiplied by twenty four, there are 8,766 hours per average year. That would be a minimum of 13,150 gallons and at 50% around 21,000. Can our ranch generate enough income to keep us in biodiesel?"

"If you maximized your livestock production I believe it can. Are you interested?"

I looked at Mona and she nodded.

“Yes, we’re interested. Don’t have any idea how much the reduced sunlight is going to affect production, but we can give it a shot.”

“That half section to your east is abandoned. They sold off their livestock, packed a trailer and took off for Texas. The owner’s brother has a very large ranch down there and I heard he said plainly that they wouldn’t be coming back. How about farming that land for more feed?”

“Harry and I will go check it out. If it’s like you think, we might just do that. There’s another abandoned half section across the road. I wonder if we could use it to start a truck farm.”

“Even if you had the equipment, a truck farm would be a lot of manual labor. If, and it’s a big if, you could get some of the survivors from Sterling to supply the labor in exchange for food and a little gold or silver, you might make it work.”

“Like good ol’ Percy, huh?”

“Are you referring to Percivale George Jackson?”

“Yeah, you remember the barter system he used in that story? He supplied the needed goods up front and was paid back in labor, later.”

“Despite the size Sterling had grown to before the war, there were many people who had been raised on farms. Not all of them fled the farm any further than to take a job in town and move there. I may know a few, Mona surely knows a few from her days at the Extension office and Harry probably knows or knows of some, too.”

“Rog, I’ll check.”

“Break, break channel 13. This Bob on the dome and we have company.”

“I’ve got you Bob. Where and how many?”

“I don’t have a count yet Alan. One pickup with a six passenger cab. There are people in the back, too. They’re moving slowly, maybe ten miles per hour, checking out the fields and so forth. The gate is locked but the barrier posts aren’t in place. They’re coming from the direction of Sterling.”

“We’d better go to red alert until we know what’s happening. I’ll join you on the dome with my sniping rifles. Alan clear.”

“Mona, you heard. Get everyone turned out, armed. Make sure they have their soft body armor (Kevlar) on. Have Paul drop the steel posts into the sockets to block the gate. And then, make sure everyone is in their assigned foxhole with plenty of ammo. Have Crystal get into the shelter since she’s expecting.”

“There’s a gun and ammunition just inside the doorway. Use it only in emergency.”

When I joined Bob on the dome, he pointed to the pickup. I quickly pulled the Tac-50 from its case and checked them out using the scope. There appeared to be six in the cab and another four in the pickup bed. We were outnumbered. We had the defender’s advantage of knowing where they were and them not knowing where we were. We had more protection with the foxholes we’d dug and the sandbagged emplacement on the top of the dome. The double layer of sandbags actually was not only protection for Bob and me; it provided a good, stable rifle rest.

“Uh-oh. The guy in the back of the pickup has a rifle with a scope. It appears that it’s pointed at us.”

I fired at the rifleman and his head sort of detached from his body and went straight up. After chambering another round, I went for the driver. The glare on the windshield prevented me from seeing the driver so I aimed at the midline of the window on the driver’s side. When I squeezed the trigger and a hole appeared in the glass, the vehicle suddenly lurched forward and ended up in the ditch on our side of the road. I saw a guy shading his eyes and then pointing towards the dome.

Before I could get off a shot, he moved behind the pickup giving him concealment. With the angle being what it was, I couldn’t see the other side of the truck from underneath. Meanwhile, Paul, Dean, Harry Jr. and Bob moved down the new lane, stopping across from where the pickup was in the ditch. Moments later, fire erupted from the lane when those behind the pickup got through the roadside wire fence and moved towards the dome. Of the ten individuals in the pickup and bed, the count was now down to six.

One person was trying to conceal himself in the long pasture grass, but I saw him and used a laser rangefinder to get the distance. After adjusting the elevation on the scope, I fired and hit the person in the center of his head. Down to five. Our four boys were on their bellies, rifles crooked in their arms headed towards the trespassers. With about 100 meters separating the two groups, our four stopped and waited. Paul and Dean replaced their 30 round magazines with Beta C-MAG 100 round drums.

Although I’d lost my spotter when Bob joined the three others, I had an advantage because of my elevation. I picked up my radio and called.

“Boys they’re directly in front of you at 100 meters; it’s time to mow the grass.”

They got four of the five remaining individuals leaving one. He rose and raised his hands holding his rifle above him. I said screw it and shot the SOB. Hey, I didn’t sign

any Conventions or Accords. We retrieved the truck, using the tractor and a chain to pull it from the ditch. We pulled the driver out, wiped down the seat with gunny sacks and began loading bodies. When we had all of the roadside bodies, we collected the bodies by the road fence and finally the others.

*Ten little, nine little, eight little dead men
Seven little, six little, five little dead men
Four little, three little, two little dead men
One little de-ad man*

Except they weren't so little. John and June arrived just as we finished loading the roadside bodies.

"Y'all ok?"

"We're fine. The opposition on the other hand didn't fare so well. I think I'm going to be sick."

I moved towards the offside ditch and launched my lunch and remaining breakfast. I grabbed a bottle of water and washed my mouth out and used my handkerchief to wipe my face.

"How many did you shoot?"

"Three."

"I recognize the truck and three of the guys. They're from Sterling."

"We're going to need a new windshield and probably the front end aligned. Everything else seems to be ok. We'll just have to check it to be sure."

"This diesel engine is computer controlled. They either had a set of spares or found them somewhere. We'll take it into my old shop and do the alignment. We can get a new windshield from the automotive glass shop. It might not be too smart to be driving it around in broad daylight in town. My mechanic is still around. I'm certain he'll do the repairs for some food. I'll ask him and if he says yes, we'll just drop the truck off and let him fix it. He can bring it out here and you can load the food in your pickup and take him back to town."

"After this, I'm not so certain about truck farming the second half section. If the good people of Sterling want a truck farm I won't stop them from using that half section. Whatever we produce will be consumed by us or people willing to purchase it. If they want to use labor to make purchases, fine; we could use some help."

"If everyone is ok, we should be getting back. We came to help trap them between two forces."

John and June left, heading back home. The next day he called and said there was a search being launched for ten missing men from Sterling. I told him we'd put in an appearance and help look over the area. We moved the pickup into the machine shed and covered it with three layers of bales.

They didn't find the ten men or their pickup. We got a windshield and installed it ourselves. After, we sanded the pickup down and repainted it. John brought a new set of tires, completing the removal of identifying marks except for the VIN. The mechanic then picked up the truck and drove it to Sterling to align.

The table below will help you locate your car's unique DNA - its unique vehicle identification number. VINs are normally located in several locations on a car, but the most common places are:

- On the door frame/door post of the front doors (usually driver's but sometimes passenger's)
- On the dash near the windshield
- On the engine itself (machined pad on front of engine)
- On the car's firewall
- In the left-hand inner wheel arch
- On the steering wheel/steering column
- On the radiator support bracket
- On your car's title, registration, guarantee/maintenance book or on the declarations page of your auto insurance policy

We looked at every location on the list of possible locations plus several more. When we thought we had all of the VIN numbers removed, we changed the plates from another pickup of the same make and model and added the registration to the glove box. If asked, we would produce the registration and explain the absence of VIN numbers by saying we found the vehicle abandoned on I-76 and salvaged it because it ran. The only reason it was sitting on the Interstate was an empty fuel tank. But, the registration had the VIN if they needed it to check something. It didn't hurt that we'd taken out of state plates from Nebraska.

Our first battle had a positive outcome. We prevailed against a slightly superior force which was our intent from the beginning. Harry Jr. and Bob's 6.8 SPCs were the POF P-415s. What they needed were the POF P-416s. The 6.8 had improved range and hitting power. Harry and I agreed to take the boys to Denver and look for the P-416s and additional ammo. The dealer we used was located in Littleton, south of Denver proper.

Mona was less than thrilled about the prospect of our going to Denver. She insisted that the four of us wear the PPE with new filters and body armor. We left early the next morning driving my pickup pulling a trailer. Harry drove the repaired pickup. We hoped to arrive at the gun shop two hours before sunrise. If the trip went as planned we'd have the rifles and ammo and be on our way before sunrise. The dealership was locked up

tight, as we'd expected and hoped. Out came the cutting torch and we cut the lock out of the rear door. And then, looked through the hole and discovered a crossbar. Once removed, we had full access.

The vault was a concrete block room with the block probably filled with concrete and re-bar built against the outside block wall. So, we went to work on the door. We eventually got it open and surveyed the contents. The vault contained all of the class III weapons needed to supply a major portion of the Denver PD. All were boxed except the display models.

It was more than we expected. Harry and Harry Jr. sorted the rifles into stacks. They put Mini-14s in one pile, M1As in a second, M-16s in a third, POF P-415s and P-416s in a fourth and the last of the arms, HK-416s and HK-417s in a fifth. Display weapons were matched to their box and added to the growing piles.

A seventh pile was added for shotguns regardless of the make or model. With the fire-arms stacked, we turned to loading the ammo in the front of the trailer and pickups. Make that WW 7. We looked around and located his handgun inventory. We found the matching boxes and packed the boxes into cartons and added the cartons to the back seat of the pickup.

We made one final check and discovered the door to the basement. There were crates of military ordnance and we began to check them out. Harry opened crates and let out a long soft whistle. "Boys, find the nearest U-Haul place and get a 6x12 open trailer."

The boys each grabbed their P-415s and took off like a shot.

"Whatcha got?"

"Boy toys. Every kind of hand grenade they make; eighteen cases of them. The M67 crates each have 30 grenades! Those 10 crates there are rockets. The next two cases are 40mm grenades. The next case contains HK grenade launchers. Hang on a minute while I check this last one. Hey. Would you look at this?"

"What is it?"

"Eighteen MP5s with four position fire selector and a suppressor. Did we load any MP-5 magazines?"

"I didn't see any."

"Keep looking. They're probably somewhere here in the basement."

The boys were back with the trailer. The three of us started moving everything while Harry looked for the magazines. He found them eventually and we began loading .45ACP and 9mmP into the back of the second pickup, putting what wouldn't fit in the

bed on the back seat. We'd already cleaned him out of 5.56, 6.8 and 7.62. He only had a partial case of the Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match .50BMG.

It was well past dawn before we finished. There had been an area on the way down that set off my NukAlert. On the return trip, we were running flat out considering the load we were carrying, not wanting to dwell in the hot spot. We didn't have to go to Camp Navajo, Fort Carson, MCLB Barstow or MCLB Albany.

"Did you get everything you were looking for? That extra trailer suggests that you got a lot more of some items or extra items."

"Both. We got into the store and the vault. We found your typical mix of sporting firearms and a large inventory of NFA firearms in the vault. We pretty well had the trailer and pickups filled when we found the handguns. We stumbled across a door to his basement and hit the jackpot. He had things that you don't find anywhere except a military base or a cop shop."

"For instance?"

"Hand grenades of all types, rockets, 40mm grenades, launchers, and the pièce de résistance, eighteen MP5s with four position fire selectors and suppressors."

"Find any more .50BMG ammo?"

"We found part of a case, fourteen boxes; a case hold 20 ten round boxes."

"I think that between Daddy and you we're not short on .50BMG. I am somewhat skeptical that you found some of the things you brought home are from our dealer's location."

"Believe me; if we had gone to a military facility we would have brought several additional items, including machineguns, mortars and Claymore mines. You'll have a chance to see everything we brought back. So, in this case, I'm not really concerned if you believe me or not."

"Show me what you got."

After we unloaded and moved the rifles, shotguns and handguns to the shelter, we added the ammo and explosive ordnance to the basement.

"I didn't see anything you didn't mention, so you're off the hook."

We could have used extra 750gr A-MAX Match. There were probably hundreds or thousands of rounds of the stuff spread out around Denver. Radioactive, too. Grand Island, Nebraska was the Hornady hometown. Hornady has one building containing the administration and manufacturing facilities.

It is ~300 miles to Grand Island, way too far. Plan B; check out Sporting Goods stores that sell guns and ammo. Even if the stores have been looted, that doesn't mean the looters took everything. We had ammo for our big rifles and other priorities were much higher. Like staying alive now that people knew where we were and assumed we had food to spare.

Way back when Mona and I got married, a fair portion of the local residents knew about it. I was a wet behind the ears rancher barely turned 21 and she was the daughter of a prominent local businessman. The ranch had been successful and we now owned it outright.

Even with the volume of canning we did each year, we always had some excess we sold at the Farmer's Market. This was known by many people and we'd already had one attempt to get what was ours. We were prepared to provide some humanitarian aid for those who had a genuine need. Anyone else would have to barter with us, even if they could only offer manual labor. Mona's parents and we had a large amount of precious metals accumulated.

We belonged to a middle of the road Christian Church. One recent Sunday, the sermon was, "Am I my brother's keeper?" After Cain had murdered his brother Abel, God asked him where his brother was. Cain answered, "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?"

God's question to Cain was only the opening to a topic the Minister really wanted to discuss, Christian charity. He went on and on about the haves helping the have not's. I put \$5 in the plate as opposed to our usual \$20. Since the sermon came two weeks after the ten went missing, I wondered if he knew what had happened. I sure wasn't going to confirm anything.

After we got home, we had yet another discussion.

"It almost sounded like he knew what had happened."

"My thoughts exactly. We could donate one acre's worth of corn, barley, wheat and oats. If you agree, we could also turn over those humanitarian packages and let him be responsible for deciding who is the most deserving. I don't want any more blood on our hands if we can avoid it."

"Would that amount to much?"

"It would be approximately 150 bushels of corn, 130 of oats, 80 of barley and 45 of wheat."

"Wheat would probably be the most needed crop. Could we spare five acres?"

"Not any more than that because we only grow 20 acres each of wheat and barley. Our two biggest crops are corn and soybeans with 120 acres of each. A person can get 60

pounds of whole wheat flour from a bushel of wheat. I'd like to keep at least 3 pails of wheat, like always. It will keep us in flour. To answer your question, that small field can produce about 900 bushels of wheat or 54,000 pounds of flour."

"Then there's more than enough."

"Maybe. We're not just giving it away. I already told you that."

What were we missing? Machine guns? Mortars? Nope, we didn't have anti-matériel ammo for the .50s. We had plenty of anti-personnel ammo. We discussed it, briefly. The nearest source was probably Fort Carson. That place had more ordnance bunkers than MCLS Barstow or MCLS Albany. On the other hand, it was about 90 minutes away. If we could skirt the radiation in the Denver area and near the Springs, we'd have all of the time in the world to find what we wanted.

How many of us should make the trip? I wasn't going to father any more children because Mona had her belly button fixed. John and June were in their mid-sixties. Harry admitted that Maria had her belly button fixed, too. It was on her doctor's recommendation due to problems she experience with Robert's delivery. That sure simplified the decision; it would be John, Harry and yours truly. We set about getting everything lined up including the oxy-acetylene rig, extra bottles of gas, thermal lances, bolt cutters and anything we had that could be adapted for use as a burglary tool.

John would leave his Barrett at our place and we'd take my Tac-50. John and I also took our fancy M1As and Harry borrowed Mona's Loaded model. In addition to our rifles and pistols, we would take shotguns and the MP5s. We loaded our extra magazines for anything that used a magazine and added a crate of assorted additional ammo. Harry would drive his pickup pulling the U-Haul and I'd drive mine pulling our trailer.

We set up our packs based on a four day mission although we only intended on a two day mission. Two hours to Fort Carson, shopping until we found what we were looking for and two hours home. June was inured to John's leaving on short notice and a minimal explanation. Mona, on the other hand, said, "Again? Where to and how long?"

"Fort Carson, two days tops. We'll check in periodically on ten meters. Here're the primary, secondary and tertiary frequencies. From the top of the hour, we'll use primary for ten minutes, secondary for the next ten minutes and tertiary for the next ten minutes. We'll leave the outside speaker on between the bottom and the top of the hour and monitor 1, 2 and 3 again for ten minutes each. If you don't hear from us, call. The duress phrase will be Littleton. So if you hear us include it in a conversation, someone caught us."

"You sure don't look like James Bond."

“Which one? There have been 5 or 6 actors in that role. Look, all were looking for is some special ammunition. On the off chance we see something we can use, we might bring it home.”

“Right. Ma Deuces and M240s with linked ammo, mortars and rockets, an Mk19 Mod 3? Did I miss anything?”

“Not that I can think of. We’ll be checking Sporting Goods stores for more of the .50 caliber A-MAX Match. We will also look for Interceptor body armor with ESAPI plates and the side panels. This soft stuff is only rated IIIA and won’t stop most rifles. I’d like everyone’s sizes so we can be sure to get the correct sizes. If we can, we’ll replace our current PASGT helmets with the ACH helmets. Get clothing sizes, boot sizes, head circumference and so forth. Maybe if the locals see us wearing military uniforms and carrying military weapons they might leave us alone.

“Next subject. Wouldn’t it make more sense for your folks to move here? We can winterize their home and shut down the generator. Their PV system should produce the minimal electricity needed to keep the house around 55° so the pipes don’t freeze. They can have the guest bedroom and we can move most of what they have over here.”

“I’ll talk to Mom while you three are gone. If I can convince her, I can practically guarantee they’ll move.”

We could use the business band radios with the ACH. The ACH was a modified MICH and MICH was the acronym for Modular Integrated Communications Helmet. It also has a mounting for the AN/PVS-14 monocular night vision device. The night vision was one of several things I was referring to as something we could use. There was a new one, too. It was called the ECH, Enhanced Combat Helmet, a Marine Corps project. About the only thing I knew about those was that they were made of plastic and supposed to be 35% better than the ACH.

John rode with me and we traveled to the Springs in a roundabout way, staying off the Interstate. We took 63 south to 40/K and that west to 71 and 71 south to 94. As we approached the Springs, we circled around south on local roads and came up from the south on US 85 to the Fort. The Fort was home to multiple units including the 10th Special Forces Group. I recalled something from ‘Normal’ by Grand. They got a semi load of matériel from the 10th. The group that Dayfield had was much larger than our three families. Perhaps we could get by with less. And if we found something irresistible, we would get a semi and come back.

John would be our guide because when he’d been in the Army, way back when, he spent some time at the Fort. Regardless of why we really went, we started on the main post at clothing sales. Once we had enough of the MultiCam, boots, wicking T-shirts and socks, cold weather gear and gloves, John directed us to a supply warehouse.

We picked up Interceptor there with the side panels, extra ESAPI plates and the ACHs. Another warehouse yielded up the AN/PVS-14 monocular night vision devices. The night vision was in an electronics warehouse and we looked around. We found two channel AN/PCR-152 portable radios with GPS and tactical vest antenna systems that slipped into the plate pocket on the Interceptor armor.

These were relatively new radios and fully compliant with the JTRS. The ones we found were NIB and we took 4 dozen of the radios and antennas. We also found JTRS compliant Ground Mobile Radios for the vehicles and the vehicle antennas. According to the instruction book inside the box we opened, they would operate on 11vdc through 36vdc.

We needed some base station radios, antennas, programming interface cables, the software and whatever it would take to program the radios. We spent the necessary time to find everything and spares. Checking my watch, I realized that it was five before the hour and we hadn't called home all day.

"Base, this is Alan."

"You haven't called all day, are you guys alright?"

"Three little kids in a candy store. We hit clothing sales first, and then got the body armor with plenty of plates, elbow and knee pads, side panels and new helmets, night vision, followed by an electronics warehouse where we got a bunch of communications gear. We haven't gotten to the igloos yet."

"It took three trips, but they're moved. Anything we missed, you guys can move when you get back."

"Copy. We'll probably overnight here and be home before dark tomorrow."

"Ok, good hunting. Mona clear."

"Alan clear."

"What's up?"

"You now live at our house. Anything else in this warehouse?"

"We're done here. It's time to snoop around and find the control office for the igloos and get their list of what is stored where."

"Be nice to get a map showing the igloo numbers or whatever."

"Patience grasshopper."

After we located the general area where the igloos were, we started looking for nearby buildings that might contain the office in charge of the igloo complex. We didn't find it until after dark and finding the office didn't mean we found the inventory or igloo identification information.

We drug our packs and weapons into the office and prepared to spend the night. We were well equipped to spend a night sleeping on a cold, hard floor. We inflated out mattress pads, rolled out the sleeping bags and set up a Coleman two burner propane stove. We started a pot of cowboy coffee and a pan of water to heat.

"Cowboy coffee" is made by heating coarse grounds with water in a pot, letting the grounds settle and pouring off the liquid to drink, sometimes filtering it to remove fine grounds. While the name suggests that this method was used by cowboys, presumably on the trail around a campfire, it is used by others; some people prefer this method. This method is still used in certain situations in Finland, Norway and Sweden, which have the highest consumption of coffee per-capita. Cold water added to a finished pot will speed the settling process.

After we ate, we found a bathroom and each used a separate toilet because once flushed, the tanks didn't refill. We returned to the office and John started snooping, eventually finding the latest inventory sheet and a map of the various igloos. He located the Mk211 and circled that bunker on the map. He did the same for the M1022, each of the various types of grenades, rockets, demolitions and Special Forces ordnance and equipment. The Special Forces always seem to be the first group within the military to get the latest, greatest thing since Granny Smith Apples.

"John, if I recall correctly, there were over ten thousand people stationed here. People have to eat and ten thousand people would require a large quantity of food. That has to be stored in one of those warehouses."

"Good point, we'll pin down the location(s) before we leave and take what we can carry. I've been giving it some thought. We can find just about anything we might want here. We need to stay light and mobile if we're off the ranch. On the ranch is different. With our small population, those people remaining at home need to have some serious fire-power to offset the reduced personnel.

"If someone knows of the operation and is smart, they'll do a recon before they attack and wait until some of us leave for some reason. So, I think we should get a few select items for the ranch. Including an M2HB and several new barrels that we can pre headspace plus one Mk-19."

"You're not tricking me on that one. The standard M2HB has to have the barrel headspaced after it's installed."

"That's the general rule Alan. However, the way you pre headspace a M2HB barrel is screw it all the way in and turn it out one click at a time until the headspace is correct.

Then you wire a tag to the barrel indicating how many turns out you had to make to get the correct head spacing.

“I’m not familiar with the Mk-19 so we’ll have to study the Field Manual and Technical manual. Timing is usually not really much of an issue. The inventory sheets show both the ball/tracer belts and the AP/APIT belts. We’ll take the former for practice and the latter as our combat ammo.

“If you want to get two or three of the M240Bs for those of us away from the property, we probably should. One other thing to keep in mind is the ranges of the rockets. The M136 AT-4 has a point target range of 300 meters and an area target range of 500 meters. The M72 LAW has a point target range of 165 meters and an area target range of 200 meters.

“We’ll check out the Special Forces area and look for some Shoulder-launched Multi-purpose Assault Weapons (SMAWs). I’m not sure we’ll find any M3 Medium Anti-Armor Weapon Systems (MAAWS). That’s the Carl Gustav that USSOCOM troop’s use. If we find them, we’ll take them. They’re better for static defense against stationary targets and can reach 700 meters.

“Since there are three of us and only two vehicles, we should probably try to find a semi-tractor and box trailer. I brought a gallon of PRI-D just in case.”

“Do you believe we can do all that and get home by tomorrow night?”

“I didn’t know we had a deadline.”

“It’s unofficial. I told Mona we’d be home tomorrow night.”

“If it’s all the same to you, we’ll stay until we run out of spaces to haul things. I’d prefer not coming back.”

“Fair enough. You can explain to Mona if we’re delayed. By the way, the duress phrase is Littleton.”

He did. We didn’t find a semi that would run and settled on a military truck.

“Let’s use that HEMTT.”

“That’s not a HEMTT.”

“How can you tell?”

“It has ten wheels not eight. I think that may be a Palletized Load System truck. If I’m right, we can put a 20’ container on the back and haul up to 33 tons between the truck and trailer.”

Thirty three tons of equipment and ordnance was a lot. Once we had the PLS and container, we returned to the warehouses and first looked for food. We found what we could and turned to the storage area for the 10th. They had the updated Ma Deuce; the M2E2. We took four of those with the spare barrel and tripods plus several more new barrels and the Technical Manual on how to set the headspacing. Ammo for the fifty went into the container along with a large quantity of belted 40mm grenades to use with the Mk 19s we found. John said these seemed to have a different cradle from what he remembered. We took the two we found and two tripods.

“We need an up armored Hummer with a ring mount. Check that, we need two, one for an M2 and one for an Mk 19.”

“And how do you propose to get those back to the ranch?”

“I’m working on it Alan, chill. We haven’t found them yet.”

Un-huh. We found a pair of M1114 up armored armament carriers. The container went on the truck and the Hummers on the trailer. The next morning, we located the fuel stores. It was all JP-8 and we didn’t have an immediate need for the fuel or a way to transport it.

Our gleaning amounted to a little of this and a little of that. SCAR-L and SCAR-H rifles were found stored in an armory and each rifle had three barrels. SOCOM had cancelled the production of the SCAR-L claiming it didn’t have any significant advantages over other platforms. Bzzz. It’s a short stroke gas piston!

We found 24 of the L versions and 36 of the H versions. There was an ample supply of M118LR 7.62 and the Mk 262 Mod 1 5.56 sniper ammo. Call it WW 8. However, I ask you to keep one thing in mind. We planned to stay on the ranch except when we needed to find more fuel and a few other supplies. If push came to shove, we could blend our own COB horse feed. To date, we’d had the single attempt to take what we had. From that, I’d decided that the residents of Sterling were on their own.

“You know if we mount an Mk 19 and an M2E2 on the dome, we can reach the entire ranch with the fifty and most of it with the Mk 19.”

“I thought it had a range of 2,200 meters.”

“The cartridges do. The rear sight only goes from 300 meters to 1,500 meters. With all the Mk 211 we found, we should include it in the fifty caliber belts. We could go 1 AP, 1 Mk 211, 1 AP, 1 Mk 211, 1 APIT and repeat. We have the one in five ball-tracer belts for practice and would only be using the combat mix rarely. We could do up twelve cans that way, giving us three cans of combat mix for each gun. We’d still have the standard AP, APIT combat mix if we used up the three cans.”

“But that’s not much ammo Alan. The ammo cans we have here are the 100 round cans, M2A1. We found three of those M3 Carl Gustav recoilless rifles and both the training rounds and HEDP. We’re only interested in protecting the ranch and we have enough now to do that until our dying day.”

“I realize that Harry. Tomorrow, let’s fill any empty spaces with commissary and dining hall supplies and head home. I’d better call Mona.”

“Mona, this is Alan. Mona, this is Alan.”

“What happened, get lost?”

“No, we’re having good luck on locating matériel and food supplies. We have enough of everything to keep us at home for a long time.”

“Did you find fuel?”

“Tens of thousands of gallons of JP-8. We couldn’t get a semi-tractor to run and ended up with a PLS. It will haul 33 tons. We overloaded the pickups and trailers. We will be home tomorrow night.”

“Mona clear.”

“She didn’t sound happy.”

“You noticed, huh? She’ll get over it later or sooner.”

“Isn’t the expression sooner or later?”

“I prioritized it.”

“I see.”

We returned to the warehouse with the electronics and optics and cleaned out all of the ACOGs. They were the TA01Bs for the 7.62 caliber rifles and the TA31RCO-M150CP-G (M150). We filled the insides of the Hummers with the food stores and were ready to leave by 2pm.

“Mona, this is Alan.”

“This is June, Alan. Mona is not available.”

“Right. We’re leaving.”

“Copy. You’re departing. June out.”

Driving the overloaded pickups pulling the overloaded trailers and John getting a bit of experience learning to drive the PLS translated into a slow journey home. It took every bit of four hours before we were pulling in at the ranch. Maria and the boys were out to greet Harry and June was out to welcome John back. My three kids were there too.

“Where’s your mother?”

“In the house. You’d better let her work off her mad, dad. She’s upset because you were gone so long which worried her to distraction. You didn’t really maintain communications like you said you would. She tried calling several times and couldn’t reach you. I think she’s more than a little put out.”

“Ok Paul, thanks for the warning. She’s really mad?”

“You could bottle and sell it.”

“Ok, why don’t you get Dean to help you and unload my pickup and trailer? I might as well go to Grand Island and really give her a reason to be angry.”

“Can we ride along?”

“We who?”

“Dean and I.”

“You want to get on her list too?”

“At the moment even grandpa is on her list. What’s in Grand Island?”

“Hornady. We got M1022 and Mk 211 but didn’t stop at any sporting goods stores. We didn’t exactly hit any communities if we could avoid it. Fort Carson was totally abandoned and we didn’t see anyone at Peterson AFB or Schriever AFB.”

“What will we need to take?”

“Besides your weapons? Food and water for five days. We’ll refill my fuel tanks and take several jerry cans of diesel.”

“And, we’re looking for what?”

“That 750gr A-MAX Match for my Tac-50, 7.62 A-MAX Match and SPBT Match, 6.8 SPC and match grade 5.56. We might as well check for pistol and revolver ammo while we’re at it.”

“It’s going to take us until later to empty the truck and trailer.”

“See if Harry Jr. and Bob can help you. I’d better put in an appearance before she slits my throat.”

“We’re back.”

“Did you leave anything at Fort Carson?”

“Quite a bit, if you must know. We picked up a few rifles, plenty of optics, clothing, helmets, vests and communications gear, among other things. Some of which were more boy toys. The boys and I are going to Grand Island in the morning and that that will be the last trip until we need more fuel. There are thousands of gallons of JP-8 at the fort. Once we return and get our defenses set up, we’ll be staying home.”

“I don’t like it when you’re gone.”

“In that case, come with us.”

“Seriously?”

“Sure. We’ll make it a family outing.”

“Sara too?”

“If she wants to come.”

This time our weapons load consisted of a M1A, 590A1, the Glock 21s and Browning Hi-Powers and the MP-5s for backup close quarters combat. We didn’t take the SCARs because we needed to sight them in and familiarize ourselves with their operation. And we didn’t take the HK-416s because we didn’t need them. I’m sure the 5.56 has its place; it should go there and stay there. All sixty of the FN rifles were equipped with the Mk-13 grenade launcher, a replacement for the M203.

We packed everything we were taking before bedtime. Harry and his boys would handle the chores while we were gone and John and June would see about finding a location to store what we’d brought back.

We left at 6am. Paul had his M1A for his go to weapon, Dean his 590A1 and Mona and Sara, the MP-5s. My Super Match was readily available and the Tac-50 in the back seat between Mona and Sara. We averaged about 50mph and hit Grand Island at noon. We had lunch and located Hornady. They were open and cranking out ammo for all it was worth.

“I figured you’d be closed down.”

“And you were going to help yourself?”

“Yep. Since you’re not, can I buy some ammo?”

“Do you have a FFL?”

“Federal Firearms License? No, we don’t. Do we have to have one?”

“No. I was interested in your reaction. What do you have to pay for the ammo? We’ve given up on bartering and won’t accept plastic, cash or check.”

“Gold?”

“Yes. At the last spot price before the war. It was at \$1,993 but we’re using \$2,000 an ounce. Silver is worth \$40 an ounce. What are you looking for?”

“A-MAX Match 750gr for my fifty, 168gr A-MAX Match and BTHP for my Super Match, match grade 120gr 6.8 SPC and 75gr 5.56. We can also use 124gr 9mm and 230gr .45ACP.”

“How much do you want?”

“How much do you have?”

“More than you’ll want.”

“Three thousand of the .50 caliber, five thousand of each of the 7.62, ten thousand of the 6.8 SPC and ten thousand of the 5.56.”

“It’s \$500 a case for the fifty, \$200 a case for the 7.62, \$175 a case for the 6.8 SPC and \$150 a case for the 5.56. All cases are 200 round cases. Our handgun ammo is pricey. There’s a guy in town who sells Speer if you’d rather have that in the 9mm and .45ACP.”

“We’ll do that, thank you. Now how about .45 Colt, .45-70, .357 magnum, .44 special and .44 magnum?”

“We have some of each.”

“Make it 4,000 rounds of the handgun calibers and 2,000 rounds of the .45-70.”

“Let me get them started assembling your order and I’ll tally up the total. What are you driving, a semi?”

“Pickup and trailer.”

“You’re going to be way overloaded.”

“Yeah, but what’s new?”

“It comes to fifty thousand. Do you have that much gold?”

“Twenty five ounces, right?”

“Yep.”

I counted out the one ounce Eagles. We got the name of the guy selling the Speer ammo, his address and directions. By the time we headed home it was up to WW 9.

“Do you want to switch off driving and drive all of the way back?”

“It will be after midnight. Let’s take a vote.”

When I heard four ‘Ayes’ I stopped and let Mona drive. Two hours later she switched to Paul and he drove for the next two hours. Dean drove us the rest of the way home. I had called ahead on the radio and warned both John and Harry that the trip was a success and we were driving straight through. I told them we’d arrive sometime between 9pm and midnight.

We arrived around ten, had a quick meal and went to bed. Early the next morning, I was awakened by the sounds of construction. I peered out the window and observed a large building being erected, a pole building. I dressed, made a pot of coffee and went out to see what was going on.

“They’ll be done tonight Alan. It will be a dirt floor, but we’ll have the needed storage space. I was able to round up a group of my guys and we’ll be paying them for their labor in food. They’ll be splitting 2 steers and 4 hogs plus some staples. I’m also going to give them a little gold. How did the trip go?”

“Hornady was open and operating. We got what we went for with 25 ounces of gold at two thousand an ounce. Another guy in Grand Island had Speer and we got some 9mm and .45ACP from him. I’m going to have some breakfast and start making plans for our future security.”

“Talk to you later.”

“What’s for breakfast?”

“Pancakes and sausage; it will be ready in a few minutes if you want to get a quick shower.”

“I think I’ll do that.”

When I returned, the food was on the table and Mona was pouring me coffee.

“How come it took you three all that long down at the fort? We got everything accomplished in one long day yesterday.”

“One, there was no one at the fort and we had to hunt up everything we found. Two, all the stuff we got from the fort was free. Finally, we also spent time checking out things for future trips. For the moment, at least, we can get all of the fuel we’ll need at the fort and all we’ll be out is a little time.”

“Did you go by Cheyenne Mountain and say hi to the prez?”

“Sure. The Secret Service was delighted to see us and complimented us for rescuing the abandoned supplies at the fort. Get serious, will you? One wrong turn and we’d have been on the road to the mountain and you’d be wondering until doomsday where we were and what happened to us.”

“We already had doomsday.”

“More like TEOCAWKI. I’m so grateful that you and your family made our survival and continued existence possible. We may not need the items we got from the Fort but, it’s one of those would you rather have it situations.”

“Are we going to be able to continue producing crops?”

“I don’t really know; I hope so. While we have enough food for all of us, we only have about a year’s worth for the livestock. My greatest concern is a repeat of the previous episode with the residents of Sterling. We have enough to share although it’s limited. Perhaps I was too quick to jump to a judgment about helping out the Sterling survivors. I’ll tell you right now that it might not be a bad idea to grow a much larger garden this year with an eye to bartering the extra fresh food to the folks in town. On the other hand, if they show up armed and demanding, we’ll meet them with force.”

“Aren’t you being harsh?”

“If you say so. It’s not like we don’t know the people in town. If they indicate a willingness to participate in their survival, we’ll lend a hand. If they want a handout, they can get it from the government. When you think about it, they need us far more than we need them. If that’s cold, I’m sorry. It’s just a fact of life.”

“What will you do when the equipment starts to breakdown?”

“If we have the parts or can get them, repair it. If we don’t have the parts and can’t get them, we’ll use horse power. By definition, one horsepower equals 33,000 foot pounds per minute and it was the ability of a draft horse to lift 33,000 pounds one foot and hold it for one minute. That’s one of my major concerns; we don’t have any draft horses, harnesses or horse drawn equipment.”

“Can we get what we need?”

“I’m not sure where to start looking. It would be easy to convert our wagons to horse drawn by changing the tongues. Our horses could be broken to harness and pull the wagons. Our steers are oxen and can pull a plow, disk, mower, corn picker, etc. We can build oxen yokes and train the steers. They’re slower than horses. Conversely, they can pull heavier loads for longer periods of time without stopping to rest. We just need to find an agricultural museum.”

“What’s on your schedule for today?”

“Your Dad said the building would be finished by tonight. The boys and I will unload what we got yesterday into the basement. After that, we’ll go through the things we brought back from the fort and store a portion in the basement. The remainder will have to wait until tomorrow so we’ll go ahead and improve our security. We’ll unload the Hummers and mount the machineguns. We got the new M2E2 machineguns and a pair of Mk 19s. We’ll mount one Mk 19 on a Hummer and the other on the dome. We’ll mount a M2E2 on the other Hummer and the second on the dome. That will leave us with two spare M2E2s and four M240s.”

“Why don’t you put a M240 on the dome?”

“Sure, why not? It will mean more sandbags but we brought some back from the fort.”

“See, I was right when I said, ‘Right. Ma Deuces and M240s with linked ammo, mortars and rockets, an Mk19 Mod 3? Did I miss anything?’”

“We didn’t get mortars.”

“Why? Couldn’t you find them?”

“We didn’t look. As it is, most of the crew served weapons will be manned by one individual. We’ll have to disperse the ammo and weapons and can keep them covered with tarps. We only have twelve adults, us, your parents, our three kids, Harry and Maria and their two boys and Crystal. Crystal will need to be in the shelter to protect their baby, leaving us with eleven or one squad of Infantry.”

“What kind of firearms did you bring back?”

“Besides the machine guns? Those FN SCARs, twenty four in 5.56 and thirty six in 7.62. We brought all three barrels for each weapon. The Light uses 10”, 13.8” and 18” barrels and the Heavy uses 13”, 16” and 20”. The Light uses a standard AR-15/M-16 magazine and the Heavy uses a non-compliant magazine. We brought back a lot of magazines and rebuild kits.”

“So, are we going to maintain a guard rotation?”

“Yes we are. We have practice ammo for the heavy machine guns and the grenade launchers. We’re going to have to learn how to use what we brought back because I don’t have a clue. John said he could provide guidance and we have the Field Manuals and Technical Manuals. If we can find another tanker, I’d like to bring up a load of JP-8 for the Hummers and save our diesel fuel for the generator.”

“Why?”

“JP-8 lacks the lubricating properties of number two diesel fuel.”

“So? Gasoline two cycle chainsaw engines shouldn’t be run on plain gasoline. You just need to add some oil to the JP-8 like chainsaw owners add to their gasoline.”

“The manual says, Jet fuel is often used in ground support vehicles at airports, instead of diesel. The United States military makes heavy use of JP-8, for instance. However, jet fuel tends to have poor lubricating ability in comparison to diesel, thereby increasing wear on fuel pumps and other related engine parts. Civilian vehicles tend to disallow its use, or require that an additive be mixed with the jet fuel to restore its lubricity.”

“Isn’t that what I just said?”

“I guess so. I think we’ll start with a 50:1 ratio of fuel to oil and change the ratio if needed. Some two cycle engines require a 32:1 ratio and others a 16:1 ratio. The minimum I’m aware of is the 100:1 ratio. The 50:1 ratio is what’s used for Stihl chainsaws.”

We filled sandbags and got the emplacements organized on the dome. There were two in addition to the existing one. One held an Mk-19 on a tripod and the other an M2E2 on a tripod. We put ten cans of ammo and the spare barrel in the M2 emplacement before covering it with a tarp. We put ten cans of the belted grenades in the other emplacement and tarped it over.

Our original emplacement had an M240 with ten cans of ammo and tripod added. It also got an M3 and a dozen HEDP rounds. Since this was our primary OP, it wasn’t tarped over despite the fact that there was a tarp inside. We did add a third row of sandbags. Our next chore was unloading the Hornady ammo and passing some of it out. Harry Jr. and Bob needed the 6.8 SPC.

When we’d completed that, we moved the FN weapons to our basement and, after looking for a few minutes, stored them in one of the few remaining holes. I wondered briefly if there was more than just safety involved in storing ammo in bunkers and igloos. In addition to the security, the facility was pretty much climate controlled since it was like a manmade cave.

Mona gave us a 30 minute warning that supper was close to ready. We stopped what we were doing and got cleaned up. I realized that we'd been so busy that we'd skipped lunch. When I got a whiff of beef roast, my stomach growled.

"Why did we get match grade 5.56 ammo yesterday?"

"Those FN SCAR-Lights with the 18" barrel are sniper rifles."

"We have to stop getting so many different firearms. By the time I could figure out which gun I wanted, the fight would be over."

"Do you have any favorites?"

"The Hi-Power pistol for sure. For close in work, there's nothing wrong with the MP-5s. The rest of the time probably the HK-416 with the suppressor. The sights are adjusted for the suppressor. The carbine is cleaned and oiled and back in your family collection. If there is a long range situation involved, I'll use the loaded."

"Don't forget we got HK-417s from that dealer. You know how TOM hates the AR-15/M-16? I'll bet he loves the AR-18/AR-180."

"What are they?"

"Stoner kept working on the AR-15 and produced an AR-16 which used a short stroke gas piston. When Stoner left Armalite, a guy name Miller took over the design. He developed an AR-18 in 5.56mm. The semi-auto only version was called the AR-180. Long story short, no military ever adopted the AR-18 but the design contributed to future arms like the G36. The HK-416 is based on the G-36 so its grandpa is the AR-18. It gained some notoriety through its use by the Irish Republican Army, who allegedly christened it the 'Widowmaker'."

"Alan, that's what I mean about having a problem figuring out which gun to use. We have HK-416s and now FN SCAR-Ls. Plus you added the HK-417s and now the FN SCAR-H. But the loaded has greater accuracy than the 417 or Heavy. It's much simpler than the other two and like you said, looks like an American rifle. If you knew about the AR-18, why did we wait and buy HK-416s?"

"I didn't know about them at the time. The knowledge was a rather recent acquisition."

"I see. When it comes to shotguns, all I have to remember is whether it has a cross bolt safety or tang safety and whether the slide release is behind or in front of the trigger."

"That's easy to remember. If you use your finger on the safety, you use it on the slide release. If you use your thumb on the safety, you use it on the slide release."

"This is Harry Jr. Red Alert, Red Alert."

“Harry, this is Alan, what’s up?”

“There’s a crowd headed this way and they’re all armed.”

“Are they in vehicles or on foot?”

“On foot. Looks like maybe thirty to forty.”

“Mona, if you’ll notify everyone, I’ll get my rifles and join Jr.”

When I got to the top of the dome, I could see the crowd that Harry Jr. was trying to describe. He might have been a bit conservative on their numbers; it looked like almost fifty to me. I yanked the tarps off the M2 and Mk 19 and loaded the first belt in each. We hadn’t had a chance to practice yet. Dean had spent some time leafing through the manuals. I then joined Jr. in the OP and loaded both the M240 and the M3.

“What’s that gadget?”

“A recoilless rifle that shoots an 84mm HEDP projectile. There is a flechette round for it which would be ideal about now, but we didn’t find any. We have HEDP or HEDP. The range is less than the Mk 19 so we’ll wait for a gunner.”

“How many rounds per can?”

“These are the larger M548 cans, so 48 rounds. We also got some smaller cans with 32 rounds, the PA120 cans. I think I’ll put one over their bow.”

I loaded a magazine that contained 5 rounds of Mk 211 and lined up my sights on one of the guys who seemed to be a leader type. The round went through him and into the guy behind him before it detonated. I think I’m going to love this stuff. I concentrated on identifying another leader type and plugged him too. He had soft body armor and the round went off before it exited. About then, Paul dropped in the Ma Deuce emplacement and Dean into the Mk 19 emplacement. Dean made a quick adjustment with the rear sight release and let go with a short burst. He then made an adjustment with the elevation wheel and found the front of the crowd.

It sort of reminded me of what happened the last time when I told them to mow the grass. Dean yelled out the range to Paul and Paul cranked the elevation knob and opened fire using 6 to 10 round bursts. This was one case where we could have gotten by using the training ammo. It didn’t last long and the recoilless rifle wasn’t needed. When they were all down, we checked the bodies. Those few that were only wounded were put out of their misery.

“Well...there is no way we can play dumb this time Alan. With this many men involved, at least some of their families knew where they were going. What do you want to do?”

“We’ll collect their equipment and take them back to Sterling. The families can bury them.”

“The body count was 46 by the way. We’re going to have a whole lot of people mad at us.”

“The ironic part was that Mona had talked me into softening my initial hard position.”

“Haven’t enough died? The only way that they will get to us if they get some arty.”

“Keep that to yourself John.”

After collecting the weapons and ammo, we loaded the bodies into three pickups and headed to town. When we arrived, there was a large collection of women and children.

“Come get you dead. There’s no way you’re going to get anything from us by force of arms.”

“Where are their weapons?”

“Spoils of war. Listen and listen well. We can provide food. We won’t just give it away. We can use help on the ranch and can pay in food and a small amount of silver so you can get things we don’t have. Our only interest is in protecting what we have and we’re very prepared to defend our place. So, you either decide to work with us or against us. If you choose the former, you’ll have full bellies. Choose the latter and you’re going to end up six feet under.”

“We grow wheat, oats, corn, barley, soybeans and hay. We also have a large garden and if we can get some help, we’ll make it larger and share the produce. With few exceptions, if you expect charity, see the government. We’re holding onto the weapons until someone demonstrates some responsibility. Then, they’ll be returned on a case by case basis. About the only resources we lack to protect the ranch is an Abrams tank and a Bradley fighting vehicle. And, we know where to get them. We brought some humanitarian aid for the truly needy. It’s only beans, rice and corn meal, the three principal ingredients in Mexican cuisine.”

There was more than a little grumbling as the pickups were unloaded and loud cries when a family member was unloaded. This trip, we brought two bushels of wheat and two of oatmeal and a 50 pound bag of powdered milk in addition to the 100 pounds each of rice, cornmeal and pinto beans. When they were done unloading, we unloaded the food and returned home.

Would You Rather... Seven

The ongoing recovery.

*Swear allegiance to the flag
Whatever flag they offer
Never hint at what you really feel
Teach the children quietly
For some day sons and daughters
Will rise up and fight while we stood still*

We didn't really stand still, there was too much to do. When the townspeople began appearing in twos and threes, unarmed, we began to set up a barter system. Food and labor would be based on pre-war prices and the advances limited to one month of food per person. They would be expected to put in labor to offset their account balances. We had all kind of jobs available, running the gauntlet from babysitting to mucking stalls to spreading fertilizer (manure), plowing, disking, raking and planting.

Later in the year, there would be gardening and cultivation of the crops plus canning and preserving the garden crops. We could still get the hogs and beef processed in Sterling. Few people could afford to outright purchase a beef but, since the hogs were smaller, some people bought hogs. The processing available included brining, smoking, and cutting and wrapping. The beef was butchered, aged, cut and wrapped. The processing plant bought beef and supplied it to the only grocery store that was reestablished.

Everything sold in the grocery store was produced in the local area by one person or another. People began to specialize in what they could do best. Some produced pasta and others grew tomatoes and produced pasta sauce. The same applied to other things like beans and rice. It's was like something TOM used to mention, improvise, adapt, overcome.

There was little evidence of a federal government. Local governments were reorganized and later state governments emerged. The new states didn't always have the same borders as before the war and obstacles to travel seemed to be the basis for the new borders. Sterling, for example, was within the Nebraska border when the dust settled. In this case, the Nebraska border had been extended south and turned east along the line of its southern border with Kansas. The western border now ran between Wiggins and Fort Morgan. The southern border ran straight east just south of US 34 and Woodrow was just inside of Colorado.

The difference in state guns laws didn't mean squat. People had what they had and open carry and concealed carry was a simple fact of life. Folks just ignored anything other than local ordinances and there were few local ordinances concerning firearms. The most prominent was the prohibition of firearms in bars. Alcohol and gunpowder will mix physically but not psychologically.

Since one can't avoid taxes and death, our tax funds went to Lincoln rather than Denver. John and June continued their estate transfer scheme and we had to add storage cabinets to the shelter storage room to 'temporarily' hold their gold and silver. Yes, cabinets, plural. They only stored the bullion coins in that big old safe. The junk silver was stored in cabinets.

With silver generally running at \$40 an ounce, a \$1,000 face value of junk silver was worth a minimum of \$28,600. A small portion, three bags of each denomination, were uncirculated and worth a few dollars more, \$28,920. Those were set aside to be divided among our three offspring. How did they know we'd have three offspring? Coincidence, John claimed.

We still had the occasional outsider that didn't know quite what they were up against when they made their best effort to get what we had. Poor reconnaissance was the only explanation we could come up with. The soil across the road was going to be extremely fertile someday. We did use the adjoining half section and grew half in wheat and the other half divided into forty acre plots each growing a different kind of bean. We had pinto, great northern, navy, and planned to vary the final forty between red beans, black beans, pink beans, kidney beans and lentils.

It's only fair to give those outsiders a little credit. They didn't kill anyone because it was so hard to get close. They did manage to wound Sara once and me twice. I hadn't realized just how much a 'flesh wound' could hurt. The first time, she was on guard in the OP and per my usual habit, joined her in the OP. I was getting my Tac-50 out of the case when a guy shooting a POF 6.8 416 emptied a magazine in our direction. He hit her in her right arm and me in my left shoulder. I don't know what went down because I passed out. I woke up on a litter being carried to the house with Sara walking beside the litter. The bullet came in just below my collar bone and punched a hole in my shoulder blade.

After that, the guidelines were changed to prohibit more than one family member in a single fighting position. Harry was in the OP the next time we had trouble. Three guys shouldn't have presented a problem. Actually, it wasn't the three of them that were the problem. There were four of them, not three. Number four was armed with a .338 Lapua magnum and he was a reasonable shot. If he'd have been a better shot, I wouldn't be here so he gets a C+ or B-. His shot was high and to his left (my right) and I ended up with a matching hole in my right shoulder blade.

Each time I'd been shot, we didn't have any more visitors until I was healed up enough to resume my first response to the OP. After the second bullet, John assumed those duties for me.

One thing we lost as a result of the war was our source for western saddles. We scavenged what we could for miles around, even risking a few trips to Denver. In the long

run, it didn't seem to matter because if a person took very good care of a saddle, it out-lived the horse.

One of the locals began to manufacture saddles. The seat was based on the McClellan saddle but the saddle as a whole was a western saddle. He explained that he went with the McClellan seat because they didn't squeeze him when he sat on the saddle. He didn't quite have an assembly line although several locals went to work for him.

We bought several of the saddles for food and silver. He also had a sideline building lined scabbards to fit whatever rifle you had, adjusted to expose as much or as little of the stock as you preferred. We had scabbards from Kirkpatrick for every lever action rifle and some for our shotguns.

The first five years after the war saw little change on a national level. The various states had worked out border changes and whatnot and things seemed to be improving. Winters were colder and ran a little longer but we didn't know if that was the so called nuclear winter or global climate change. The summers, what there was of them, were hot and dry. I have both the TTAPS and the climate change scenario on my laptop and either could account for our weather.

The first glimmer we had that the federal government had survived was when WWV resumed broadcasting the time. That we heard it wasn't remarkable, the transmitter was located in Fort Collins. The remarkable thing was that Fort Collins got it's time hacks from NIST's Time and Frequency Division which is located in Boulder. Because Boulder was northwest of Denver it shouldn't have been affected by Denver being nuked. Somewhere along the line the time signals weren't getting from Boulder to Fort Collins or Fort Collins wasn't on the air.

At least some of the federal folks were back to doing their jobs. Now, if they could just get FEMA out of Mt. Weather and the prez would come out of the mountain, we'd be standing in tall cotton. It went on like that for about six months until most everyone was tuning in WWV on their shortwave to adjust their clocks. Then, out of the blue, WWV made an announcement. The President would address the nation. Right, he'd been elected before the war and had been in the mountain for five years. The war happened before the inauguration. What did they do, suspend the elections?

My fellow Americans,

Your government was able to restore radio communications about six months back using WWV. Using that means of communication, you government has assembled such information as it could concerning the condition of our country.

It's not good around the country as a whole. Resurgence started at the local levels and spread to the state levels. Several state governments have been reformed. Forty eight of the state capitals were targeted and destroyed. We believe that the two not stuck was

due to a failure of the warhead or targeting. Major metropolitan areas around the country were destroyed in addition to the capitals.

Some states have entered into agreements changing the borders as they existed at the time of the war. Here in Colorado, the northeastern part of the state is now part of Nebraska. In the Midwest, the latest state to be formed came about by Missouri and Arkansas ceding portions of their respective states to permit the formation of the state of Ozark.

At the moment your government lacks the means to respond more fully to those of you in need. Our national drug stockpiles all went up in atomic smoke. Your Navy is functioning at a greatly reduced level due to extremely limited fuel supplies and stores. We have been able to negotiate with Brazil and other South American countries to provide what supplies our military has and have been forced to pay for the supplies in gold. Fort Knox isn't empty, but some of the vaults have spare room for any new gold we can produce.

The Coast Guard has resumed its wartime role as part of the Navy and the Marines, of course, always have been part of the Navy. The Army and Air Force have, at my direction, formed a joint command to share resources. Our military forces are organized for now much like they were at the end of World War Two.

We restored operations at one refinery last year and last week a second came online. The entire output of these two refineries is being conserved for use by the military and your government. We have been unable to activate the National Guard for a variety of reasons. When you see a military unit appear in your towns and cities, they will either be US Marines or US Army and we expect local authorities to confirm their identities. Each legitimate unit will have a radio frequency that you can use to contact Cheyenne Mountain via the amateur bands.

That's the good news such as it is. Now for the bad news. Many of you can recall how the Pacific Rim volcanoes and seismic faults acted up during the 2011-12 time period. There was a period of relative quiet but as we move further into 2018 the Pacific Rim is more active than it has been during recorded history. As you are probably aware, our Cascade Range is the eastern edge of the Pacific Rim and our surviving seismologists have forwarded warnings to us about increased activity in the Cascades. The Cascadian subduction zone is forecast to let loose during the next five years.

If that wasn't enough, several of the calderas in the US are showing increased activity. I had the questionable pleasure of reading several so called patriot fiction stories recently. A Major here in the Mountain had two CDs and he shared them with me. It's not like I have a new bill to sign every day so I read a few of the stories. This one author seemed to be enamored with the M14 and had a theme throughout his stories. He claimed that bad things happen in threes.

As near as we can decipher, the man lives in southern California along the San Andreas Fault. If Cascadia slips and or the Cascade Range erupts, the San Andreas will probably shake. I hope for his sake and ours that he's wrong about that old wives tale. My seismologists also warn me that if our side of the Pacific Rim becomes too active, the forces released could affect some of the calderas.

Even in that event, some will survive. It's the human spirit and most assuredly the American spirit. As much as I'd like to suggest those of you out there listening to me increase your preparedness, there is so little for so many. My aide just told me I'm rambling and that most of those listening are probably survivalists anyway and I'm preaching to the choir. So, I'll shut up.

God Bless You and God Bless America.

"Do you think we should go to California to try to rescue TOM?"

"Yeah right. If he's still alive, he's 75 and he doesn't have anything we don't have. Except his rifle probably has fewer rounds through it than any of ours do. Remember him describing his ideal M1A?"

"Not really, remind me."

"Well, it's Super Match like yours except for the scope. He'd put a Carl Zeiss Victory Diavari 6-24x72 T scope on it. That scope is 15" long and weighs about 3½ pounds. It would have a RapidZ 1000 illuminated reticule. That's their tactical/sniper scope and reticule combination. I think the scope costs almost as much as the rifle. A.R.M.S. has their #22-34 Throw Lever rings for only \$185 and the #M21/14 mount is only another \$185. The MSRP for the scope is four grand and Optics Planet had them for \$3,500. I paid less than that for your rifle. Add it up Alan; he'd spend more on optics than the rifle."

"Everyone has to have a dream."

"I agree. And, if you're going to dream, dream big."

"So, what's it going to be, Cascadia, Yellowstone, Long Valley or a combination of the above?"

"Don't forget Nibiru."

"I saw both movies. I thought Deep Impact was better but Armageddon did better at the box office."

"Personally, I liked Space Cowboys. At least three of the four survived."

"That wasn't an asteroid story."

“No, but if those missiles had been launched at the Earth it might have been as bad as Deep Impact.”

We learned a lot from the broadcast. The President was alive and hiding out in Cheyenne Mountain. Some of our active military survived but the National Guard personnel were at home protecting their families. We hadn't seen many M-16s so that probably meant that the Guard took their weapons from the armories. All things considered, we were doing pretty well here on the ranch. What more could we do? Grow crops and livestock and sell what we could for whatever the market could bear.

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A year later a contingent of Marines passed through Sterling on their way to somewhere else. When they discovered survivors in Sterling, they set about collecting some information about how the people had managed during the six years since the war. Someone in Sterling must have given them an earful about our little group out here on the ranch.

“Incoming. Six Hummers and two armored fighting vehicles of some sort.”

“Rog. Hang on, Dean and I'll be there within a minute,” John replied.

“I may be wrong, but those look like LAV-25s. That's a Marine Corps vehicle and they have the 25mm Bushmaster gun plus a pair of M240s. This is John, everyone hold your fire; these guys may be friendlies.”

The vehicles pulled up to the gate and began discharging their occupants. Finally one of the LAVs dropped its rear ramp and a Captain emerged. He was surrounded by Marines carrying what looked a lot like standard barreled SCAR-Ls. He moved to the gate and just stood there. John came down off the dome and moved to meet him. Meanwhile, I got out of my foxhole and advanced carrying my long barreled SCAR-H. John and I arrived about the same time.

Looking at John, the Captain asked, “Are you in charge here?”

“No, Captain that would be my son-in-law Alan. This is his ranch and the man to my right is Alan.”

“You're the owner?” he asked me.

“Yes sir.”

“We've been in Sterling for several hours and learned about your operation out here. We were warned that you're a blood thirsty lot and are responsible for many deaths in the area.”

“That much is true. Did anyone bother to explain why the people died?”

“We just heard you had heavy weapons and weren’t afraid to use them.”

“Then, Captain, you heard right. A man has a God given right to defend himself and his family. Did anyone claim we went looking for trouble?”

“Not actually, no.”

“Why don’t we get this gate open and you and your Marines come in and sit awhile? We have hot coffee, iced tea and can make lemonade if you prefer. There’s more than enough room at those picnic tables over there by the front door.”

“Gunny, detail two men to stand watch and we’ll switch them out with two others in a bit.”

“Are you sure that’s wise sir?”

“Well, if you look at the top of that dome there, it looks like a Ma Deuce and an Mk-19 to me. They probably have more surprises up their sleeve.”

“Paul, you and Dean pull the gate posts and open the gate. I overheard Captain and we do have a couple of things you can’t see from the ground including a M3 MAAWS with HEDP rounds.”

“That’s a Special Forces weapon. Where did you get one?”

“We found them lying around, somewhere.”

“You’ve been to Fort Carson!”

“Captain, I was stationed there many years ago,” John replied.

“I see from the MultiCam and various weapons you’ve been shopping around.”

“We bought the MultiCam commercial Captain. That’s not to say that we didn’t find more when we needed it. It should be obvious from the Interceptor, the AN/PVS-14s and the ACHs that we did a little shopping. The same applies to some of the weapons we have.”

“I see.”

“You could do us a favor if you would.”

“And what might that be?”

"We borrowed a PLS and trailer. If you could have one of your Marines take it off our hands, we'd be grateful."

"Stole it you mean."

"Borrowed. We just never had a need to return to the Fort and return it. We borrowed it because we couldn't find a semi-tractor down at the Springs that we could get running. We've remedied that problem now and if you'll look around, you see several tankers with stabilized diesel plus several box trailers containing various goods. We have more, but they're at my place. It was all abandoned fuel Captain and we salvaged it and stabilized it so it could be used."

Mona, June, Sara and Maria had pitchers of iced tea and lemonade on the picnic tables along with some gallon vacuum bottles filled with hot coffee. A half-gallon vacuum bottle contained hot water for tea. They also brought out some paper plates with cinnamon rolls and a plate with butter for each table. The knives and forks were plastic.

"That's home grown and ground wheat in the rolls. We churn our own butter."

"What's your source of power?"

"We started out with my Kohler diesel generator and a small wind turbine on that monopole. Later, we scavenged some solar panels and all the accessory equipment. Our system is capable of producing 75kw and we use some submarine batteries we located in a warehouse in Denver. We have them set up in 48vdc banks feeding various inverters.

"The generator needed rebuilding around 17,000 hours. We rebuilt it but since we had the PV panels, it's only run to exercise it. John here has another, smaller Kohler generator at their place."

"Then you don't live here John?"

"No, we live here now Captain. But we still have our place down the road a ways. We're still waiting for our grandchildren to find the right person and give us some great grandchildren."

"Is everyone here armed to the teeth?"

"Yes, and more. Alan's hired man, Harry and his wife Maria, have two boys, Harry Jr. and Bob. Both are married; Harry Jr. to Crystal and Bob to Rachael. My grandchildren are Paul, 27, Dean, 25, and Sara, 23. The older lady you saw was my wife June. Alan's herd of saddle horses is growing and is around 125 head. He and my daughter, Mona, recently acquired draft horses, Belgians, Percherons, Shires and Clydesdales. Plus, they have a trained herd of oxen. They're still looking for agricultural museum to get the older horse and oxen drawn equipment."

“Just how many people have y’all killed?”

I answered that. “We don’t really keep track of that Captain. The plain truth of the matter is that we killed everyone who attacked us. The groups ranged in size from two up to fifty. It’s nothing to be proud of; it was just what had to be done to preserve our way of life and our property.”

“Some of the folks in Sterling wouldn’t agree with you.”

“We give anyone willing to work food and some silver for their labor. I always tell them that if they’re looking for a handout to contact the government. Stick around and you’ll see what I mean.”

“We’re just passing through. If that PLS is fueled, we’ll take it off your hands. What’s in it, diesel?”

“Negative, JP-8. We brought a small amount back with us to refuel the vehicle when we got home. From what we understood, JP-8 lacked some of the lubricating properties of diesel. We thought about just adding oil in a 50:1 ratio and using it. But, we found diesel instead. We only use it in the PLS and the two Hummers.”

“Hummers?”

“Uh, M1114s. We stole two and equipped one with an M2E2 and the other with an Mk-19. I don’t reckon we’ll give those up without a fight. They’re part of our defenses.”

“Is everyone armed with the FN SCARs?”

“Actually, the most common firearm is Springfield Armory’s M1A. However, we have several choices, even among those. John has an M21, I have a Super Match and my wife and kids have each have a Loaded. Our hired man has a standard model. We are well equipped with HK-416s and HK-417s plus the SCAR-Ls and SCAR-Hs. Lately we’ve been turning out to Red Alerts with full auto, usually the SCAR-H.

“We have a Barrett M82A1 and a Tac-50 for long range shooting. And since this is a ranch and we’re frequently on horseback, lever action rifles and single action revolvers.”

“Back to my question about the SCARs. Where did you find them lying around?”

“Fort Carson. They were abandoned. Hell, Captain, everything was abandoned at Fort Carson. We didn’t take much of the JP-8 though.”

“Why not? You could have mixed it about 50-50 with your diesel fuel and doubled your supply.”

"We didn't know that. John ran a construction firm and I've been a rancher since I was about fifteen."

"You don't say. And you said you own the ranch?"

"My grandfather gave it to my father and my father left it to Julie and me. I bought her out and have a deed. Is there anything else?"

"No. Point out the PLS."

"Tell whoever is driving it to follow me."

"Gunny?"

"Crenshaw front and center. Follow the civilian and he'll show you where the PLS is. Check the fuel level and top it off if it isn't full."

"Aye, Aye Gunny."

"Would someone explain the difference between Aye and Aye, Aye?"

"Basically Aye means 'I understand the order' and Aye, Aye adds 'and will do it immediately'."

"Sergeant we filled the tank on that truck after we parked it so it wouldn't get water in the tank through condensation. No one has fooled with it, we maintain a 24/7 watch. I'm not so sure I like you telling him to check the fuel level."

"Tough. Where are the HMMWVs?"

"At the point of my Glock 21."

"Tough guy, huh?"

"Belay that Gunny. Let them keep the Hummers."

"But...Aye, Sir."

"So did you take anything else from Fort Carson that we should be concerned about?"

"Not much. We did find a class three dealer in the Denver area that was a very naughty boy. We made out fairly well on destructive devices there."

"So I take it that we'd better bring an Abrams if we come back."

"John what was that one rocket we found? Was it the Javelin?"

“You know, I think it was.”

We didn't take any Javelin missiles, but if the Captain wanted to conclude that we had, that was on him. The maximum range of that missile was ~2,500 meters and the range of the 120mm M256 cannon was about 4,000 meters. Just before the war, the military began retrofitting the M1A2SEPs with the new L55 Rheinmetall tank gun and a modified version of the turbine developed for the Crusader.

We didn't know that. The new Abrams gun wasn't a direct copy of the L55. As in the case of the L44/M256, the barrel was modified to increase the resistance of the barrels to fracture and fatigue. This increased the weight of the barrel while increasing the life.

The L55's bore evacuator and the gun's thermal sleeve, designed to regulate the temperature of the barrel, are made of glass-reinforced plastic, while the barrel has a chrome lining to increase barrel life. The new American gun contained no plastic or fiberglass and was heavier with a much longer barrel life. The new barrels extended the effective range by 1,500 meters to 5,500 meters. The new engines reduced fuel consumption by 33% which gave the modified tanks much greater range.

“I sure hope we don't find ourselves in the position of fighting the Army or Marines. They have better equipment and know how to use it. And, they're professional military. At best, we're just a small militia force Alan. We may be a well-equipped militia but we wouldn't have a chance in a long engagement.”

“I wonder if that's what the Minutemen were thinking at Concord and Lexington.”

“That's not the same and you know it. The numbers were much closer, 500 rebels against 700 regulars and everyone had black powder muzzle loaders.”

“Sara told me that before it was over it was something like 500 rebels against 1,700 regulars who staged a strategic withdrawal.”

“Whatever. We don't have anywhere to withdraw to.”

“I'll give you that. A year ago our President-in-hiding said we'd be visited by military. It only took them a year. Why haven't we heard more about the Pacific Rim situation, possible climate changes or the calderas?”

“You're still forgetting Nibiru.”

“You sound like Clarence.”

“Maybe I do. Why did you tell the Captain we only had 75kw of power available from the PV panels? You know perfectly well we have 300 panels not 250 which produce 90kw, not counting the spare panels.”

“I don’t know John. It was just a gut feeling that if he thought we had more panels than we needed, they’d commandeer some of them. So, I only mentioned 75kw and didn’t bring up the 300 panels or the 300 stored panels.”

“That was some find, you know.”

“Sure was. Two truckloads of panels and equipment coming in from New Mexico and the bill of lading giving us the address in Denver to check out for the batteries. Did you pay any attention to what they were charging for the batteries?”

“Three grand each?”

“About that. That pole building sure came in handy. It’s good that you built it as large as you did.”

“I sure wasn’t thinking about batteries when I built it. I kind of thought we’d do more salvaging and scavenging.”

“Except for Fort Carson, Denver and tracking down fuel transports we didn’t need to do much of that. I know we rebuilt the generator and have the PV system but I sure would like to have another 60kw Kohler generator. I noticed you left enough room for two in the generator room and I assume those steel plates making up the overhead can be dug out and removed.”

“Right on both counts. The generator came from EC Power Systems in Aurora. We might find supplies but I doubt they’d have a generator in stock.”

“Feel up to going down to find out?”

“I guess so. I’ve never actually been to their store. They delivered on site.”

“We could always use more oil and filters. They fall into the ‘would you rather’ category. If we did end up with a large volume of airborne ash, the PV panels might not do us much good. With that manifold we installed to connect all the tankers to the underground diesel tank, we have the fuel for years. And that idea of yours to oil the road with the dirty oil sure does keep the dust down.”

“How do you want to go about it? Semi and box trailer plus a Hummer?”

“How about Harry and you in the semi and the kids and I in the Hummers? That should improve our odds if we run into some unfriendliness’.”

“What time?”

“Is seven AM ok?”

“See you then.”

I'd forgotten that I had the four to six AM shift. So, I got my things around for a three day trip and put them in the Hummer with the Mk-19. I'd get Sara to drive it and Paul and Dean could handle the M2E2. I let the three of them know about the trip and then went to explain to Mona.

“We're going down to Denver in the morning.”

“What's up?”

“We could use more oil and filters and I'd like to find a backup Kohler 60kw generator.”

“But we don't even run the one we have except to exercise it.”

“You're right, of course. But John and I got to discussing what our president-in-hiding said about the Pacific Rim and the calderas. I'd rather have it and not need it.”

“What about the solar?”

“If there were a large volume of ash in the air, they might not put out much juice.”

“But we have four 48 volt banks plus spares.”

“Right and no more cables. According the literature I found, the batteries hold 7,000 amps and each of our four 48 volt banks puts out 168,000 amps or a total of 672,000 amps connected in parallel as they are. Put another way, each cell puts out 15.4kw times 96 cells for a total of 1,478,400 watts. If we use an average of 10kw per hour, that's 240kw per day and means we can only run about 6 days on batteries.”

“That can't be right Alan. I read the literature too and it says that a twelve volt bank would run the average house for 45 days.”

“Well, forty five days times twenty-four hours is 1,080 hours. Divide that into the 92,400 watt hours and you get 85½ watts per hour. Multiply it by four because we have a 48 volt system and you get 342 watts per hour.”

“You'll figure it out, eventually. I have a question that has nothing to do with electricity. We've been turning out with SCAR-H lately. Is that a permanent change?”

“I think it will be. I know how much we've relied on the M1As. We continued to do that even after we bought the HK-416s and collected the HK-417s. However, I like the

SCAR platform and it does have full auto capacity for those few times we need it. I think we should let everyone choose whatever platform they most comfortable with, be it the HKs or SCARs. Harry's boys seem to be happy with their POF 416s in 6.8 SPC and we have enough ammo for them now between Fort Carson and Hornady."

"Good, I'm switching to the HK-416. The magazines are compliant with every 5.56 rifle and carbine we have. Those Beta C magazines you got are a little heavy, especially in the 7.62, but they're great for the 5.56. I heard that soldiers in Afghanistan had feeding problems with them and we haven't had any trouble. I don't understand that."

"Maybe they got a bad production lot. The original magazine had problems seating. However, I can't answer you Mona, I was never a soldier."

"You mean you were never in the military Alan. You not half bad as a soldier with no experience."

Since I had found myself initially choosing the SCAR-H in favor of the HK-417, I stayed with the SCAR. I knew what Harry's boys would choose but they were allowed to choose. Many of the women chose the 5.56 rifles, but not all. Sara went with the HK-417 with the 20" sniper barrel. I didn't care for the plastic magazines but other than that, she had the rifle fully outfitted with a scope, sound suppressor and AG-C/EGLM.

It was much heavier than my SCAR with the Mk-13. She had some kind of day/night vision mounted that looked like a Rube Goldberg invention. She told me it was an AN/PVS-10; a combination day/night scope with a direct view during daylight and night vision with the flick of a switch. It wasn't military, she claimed, but a civilian copy, the L-3 EOS SNS2142 8.5x Day/Night Weapon Sight.

Obviously Sara hadn't bought the scope and I wondered out loud what it was worth.

"I don't really know, Dad. Scott gave it to me. It was bad taste to ask what it was worth but I did anyway. He told me that he didn't know because it was one of those type of items that if you had to ask the price, you couldn't afford."

"Scott?"

"Well, he was in my high school class and is one of the survivors in Sterling. You've seen him out here, he works for food. He was in Northbrook when the lights went out. He found shelter and managed to survive. He told me he saw the Optics Planet location and decided to see what he could find. I already had my loaded and he decided to get that scope for me in hopes that I might have a spare rifle I could exchange for the scope. By that time, you'd cleaned out the Littleton gun dealer and we had all kinds of spare rifles. I traded him a HK-417 and thirteen magazines for the scope. It's ok isn't it?"

"Northbrook as in Chicago Northbrook?"

"It's the only one I know of Dad. He said he wanted to get Raptor's but couldn't find them. While looking through the night vision he ran across these and took them instead. They have a higher magnification and are both a day and night scope so you don't have to worry about switching scopes and hoping you haven't changed the point of aim."

"I take it you like this Scott."

"He's ok. Polite, slow to anger and your worst enemy if you do make him angry. Oh, and he's a very good shot. Right up there with Grandpa and you. Since we had the extra handguns, I provided him with a USP Tactical, spare magazines and the Knight's Armament suppressor. That's what I'm carrying these days if you haven't noticed."

"No, I hadn't noticed. Good weapon. Where did you get the suppressor?"

"Didn't you inventory what you got from that dealer?"

"I don't think we did."

"You should, you have more suppressors than we could use on all of our weapons."

"We were more focused on what we found in the guy's basement. Did you give Scott one of the MP-5s?"

"I wouldn't do that without asking. He and I do have identical setups when it comes to battle weapons."

"Maybe you could invite him to Sunday dinner so we can get to know him a little better."

"Give him the third degree you mean."

"No, simply learn a little more about him since you two seem to be interested in each other. If he has an older sister, invite her too. It's about time your brothers got serious about someone. Your Grandpa and Grandma aren't going to live forever, if you get my drift."

We weren't short on M1As either. We had a National Match that was a tack driver and more 20 round magazines than we could use in a lifetime. There was an A.R.M.S. mount and throw lever rigs that would support one of our spare Leupold Mk 4 variable scopes. I stopped to think about some of the other things we'd gotten on that trip and we had a nice 11-87P with Wilson Ghost Ring sights that would round out a minimal armory. About the only thing we didn't have was an excess of cowboy guns. But Sara had the 1894 and 1895 cowboys and 3 Colt SAAs. I knew we could work something out.

"Did you know about Scott?"

"He's a nice young man, Sara's age."

“I suggested she invite him to Sunday dinner so we could get to know him a little better.”

“Give him the third degree you mean.”

“No, I didn’t mean that. I’d like to know him better. Sara seems to be fond of him and swapped him a HK-417 for a fancy day/night scope and gave him a HK USP Tactical with a suppressor. We have a new 11-87P we could give him, if and when appropriate.”

“I like him and would look favorably on the two getting together. What about an M1A?”

“Oh that. We have a National Match that’s a real tack driver. I’m sure we can find a good scope and suppressor plus a Harris bipod.”

“Did you decide between the HK and FN?”

“SCAR-H. If circumstances dictate a sniper rifle, I’ll go with the Super Match or Tac-50. I don’t want to put a scope on my assault rifle.”

“Are you going to move the new generator to the shelter?”

“Your father arranged for a backhoe. It should be in and wired up in 2-3 days. We had a time getting it from the dealer in Aurora. The guy didn’t have a forklift that would run.”

What did you do?”

“Improvised.”

They were in the process of backfilling the hole when our weather radios all sounded. It took me a few seconds to realize what the sound was. Until that moment, we didn’t know the NWS was back in business. After listening to the message it was apparent that they weren’t. WWV was transmitting on the NWS frequencies. Same difference I suppose. The announcer warned of a possible eruption of Yellowstone. I went into overdrive, telling Sara to pick up her friend Scott and Harry and sons to secure the live-stock.

The filters in all of our air systems had been replaced after the war, using one of two spare sets for each of the machines. Dean was helping Mona move things to the shelter until June and Maria showed up. He left to check the batteries in the pole building. The charge level was 98.6%. He checked the fluid levels in each battery, adding some where needed. Paul was herding the last of the horses to the dome and Harry Jr. was saddling a horse to go after the beef.

We were about 435 miles east-southeast from Yellowstone. Worse, today’s wind was north westerly, downwind from Yellowstone. It appeared that we had time for a humanitarian run into Sterling and quickly packed two trailers which we could pull to Sterling

and drop off. When we arrived, we explained about the volcano warning and dropped the trailers. A few obviously wanted to join us on our ride back. As it was, the shelter would be overcrowded. Despite the 2,000ft² we only had beds for 14. Mona and I had a bedroom and Harry and Maria the second.

Previously, we'd put John and June on the hide-a-bed sofa. However, Harry Jr. now had 2 children and Bob's wife Rachael was expecting. This time Harry Jr., Bob, Paul, Dean and Scott would take the men's dorm and Sara, Crystal and Rachel would take the women's dorm. The two children would go in the ladies dorm and John and June would stay with the hide-a-bed.

Preps wise, we were in good shape with this years' canning and additional stores of wheat, barley, oats and corn and a whole lot more beans. We had enough rice for two years and enough spuds for a year. The barn had been closed up the same as last time and the air systems were operating at maximum capacity. All we could do now was wait for the announcement.

It didn't come from the government. The caldera provided it on its own, shaking the ground so hard that no one could stand. Those of us outside the shelter moved to complete our last minute tasks. Mona, June and Sara emptied the refrigerator and freezer compartment. Harry helped his family carrying their clothing, food and weapons to the shelter. We were set in 30 minutes before the ground shook even more than before and was followed by the sounds of the explosive eruption. It was the loudest sound I'd ever heard.

"Well, John, that's number two."

"For crying out loud, stop counting, didn't you read '3 Time Jinx'?"

"TOM?"

"No. Jerry."

"And?"

"A pandemic, followed by Nibiru and finally a GTW."

"So I'm a jinx?"

"I'm just saying..."

Would You Rather... Eight

After Yellowstone.

We think the pyroclastic flow extended between 70 and 95 miles based on later radio reports. This is one of those fill-ins mentioned earlier. As far as we can tell, this was the smallest eruption. Our absent president issued a news release through one of his flunkies claiming that the scientists in the Mountain put the volume at between 200 and 230km³. That made it smaller than Mesa Falls which ran 280km³. We had 75-76cm of ash, about 30”.

We were only in the shelter for 4 weeks until the worst of the ash fall was on the ground and not in the air. We had a lot of the P-100 masks and surgical masks for later. Our greatest concerns were clearing the ash off the fields and preventing the livestock from inhaling it. Primarily that meant keeping them in the dome until we could clear the fields. We had plenty of seed and could plant when it was warm enough and we could use a water tank and portable pump to wash down the pastures after the ash was cleared.

Every time it rained, the ash settled and became harder to work with as it congealed into a form of concrete. After months of work, every field and pasture was down to about 6-9” of ash and we plowed all 950 acres plus our garden area. John said the ash would enrich the soil and I'd read the same in some of the stories. We had plenty of manure to add to the ash for the crop fields. We plowed as deep as we could and then disked and dragged the soil. We seeded the pastures first with a mixture of clover, fescue and bluegrass. Then we seeded the alfalfa and timothy.

Because we grew 160 acres of wheat on the adjoining half section, we'd reallocated the 320 acres into 80 acres of corn, 80 acres soybeans, 80 acres of barley and 80 acres of oats. Because of everything that had happened and all the work we'd done, we had two empty double tankers. We pumped half loads of diesel into them and headed for Fort Carson. It was still a graveyard and we finished filling the tankers with JP-8 using a generator we found in a storage area.

We returned home and took the two double tankers we'd half emptied and took them down and filled them too. That took care of half the tankers we had on the ranch. John took some PRI-D over to their place and stabilized their diesel, again. He also used PRI-G on their small amount of gasoline. When our weather system indicated that we were well above cold night temperatures, we planted the fields on our 320 and the adjoining half section, alternating as always, the 160-acres of wheat and the 160 acres of various beans.

Believe it or not, despite starting out back at Christmas of 2012 with about three tons of rice, we were running low. We decided to try Arkansas because they grow a lot of rice. We got a bob truck and added 9 55 gallon drums of diesel for the trip down and return trip. John and I would go and we'd pay for the rice with gold. That failing, they could have beef and pork if they wanted to come after it. We decided to go to Jonesboro. It

looked like it was about 950 miles and three days each way and one day onsite. We'd need every bit of 6 drums of diesel going and returning. We allowed for detours and maybe a trade or two if we ran into a problem.

We agreed to each take a rifle, shotgun and our pistols. I was going to take all three barrels for the SCAR. I'd practiced changing barrels getting my time down to about as low as possible and confirming all three barrels interchanged without any problems. John was going to take his M21 with the 178gr A-MAX he liked. We agreed to take my fifty and leave his for the folks at home. We added some odds and ends in the form of fragmentation and smoke grenades, 40mm grenades and three LAWs.

We'd go with Mountain House 2-serving pouches for each of us, selecting what we liked from what was available. Since the breakfasts were single servings we doubled up on those. I selected single serving pouches of apples and strawberry for desert. We'd have our LBE with full magazines in full magazine pouches and two one quart canteens.

We also took 20 gallons of water so we wouldn't end up with Montezuma's Revenge. We had a pot, coffee/tea pot and a two burner propane stove. A bag of cheap plastic spoons and another of cheap plastic forks rounded out our utensils.

We found almost all of the hard surfaced roads to be clear of ash, the wind having moved it off. We took 76 to 80 and 80 east where we stopped for the night. The next morning we continued and exited 80 at US 82 south stopping in the Newton area. The next day we took off cross country on state and US highways, entering Missouri near Fort Scott. We continued on US 54 to Missouri 5 and turned south. The first section was good highway but the second half from Lebanon south wasn't too hot. We made it to Mansfield and realized that we were running late. We were on US 60 and pushed on, switching to US 63 south.

We crossed into Arkansas and stopped to eat. The nearest town was Mammoth Spring to the west. We kept pushing and got to US 412 which later merged back into US 63. We called it a night near Sedgwick. We crawled into the box and unrolled our sleeping bags and inflated our mattress pads. I observed that I should have paid more attention to the odometer and that the last time I'd come this way, I'd used I-70.

We drove down to Jonesboro the next morning and ate there. We asked around about rice and were directed to Arkansas Rice Mills and Windmill Rice Co for finished rice and Poinsett Rice and Grain for rough rice. Choices?

"I'm for finished rice Alan. See if someone can give us directions."

I asked a fella and got directions to both places. We started with Arkansas Rice.

"Hep you?"

"We're looking for rice."

“Rough or finished?”

“Finished.”

“Y’all came to the right place. Yankees?”

“Colorado which is now in Nebraska.”

“Yeah we had the same problem. Ozark seceded. You came through there most of the way. Rice is bagged in fifty pound bags and we sell by the hundred weight. Fifty dollars per hundred weight.”

“Is that a good price?”

“We think it is. How you gonna pay?”

“Gold ok?”

“Two thousand an ounce.”

There are 20 hundred weight in a short ton. Fifty times twenty is two thousand, e.g., one ounce of gold per ton or \$1 per pound.

“You have five tons?”

“You got five ounces of American Gold?”

“Yep.”

“Loading is extry, one silver dime per bag.”

“Well, five tons is 100 bags and 100 silver dimes seems fair enough. Where do we pull up?”

“Gold first.”

“I’ll show you the gold and stand on the loading dock with it in my pocket. You can have it and 2 rolls of silver dimes when we’re loaded.”

“Show me.”

I did.

“You do have it.”

“Right. We’ll pull up to your dock and open up the bob truck. We have to rearrange some drums of fuel.”

“Diesel?”

“Uh, yes.”

“Any extrty?”

“Three drums. We’ve gotten better mileage than we expected.”

“And you’re willin ta sell it?”

“How much are you offering?”

“You can have five tons of long grain rice, loaded, for four ounces of gold and the three drums of diesel.”

“Deal.”

“Pull around to that side over there,” he said pointing.

Gold was \$2,000 an ounce and silver was forty. Two rolls of silver dimes were worth \$286. I didn’t even have to do the math in my head to decide. We just saved \$2,286. But, we’re 950 miles from home. I looked around and I didn’t see anything but the latest assault rifles, Jed Clampett notwithstanding.

When they finished loading, I paid the man and we hit the road, returning the way we came for the first day. The only difference was that we didn’t stop until we hit the Missouri state line. I can’t get used to the Idea of calling it Ozark state. The next day we crossed into Kansas at Fort Scott, having crossed Ozark. When we got to Salina, we stopped for the night. The following morning, there were several men gathered around our truck. They were well armed.

“What’s in the truck?”

“Stuff we bought in Arkansas.”

“Do you know about the toll?”

“You didn’t have a toll when we came through a few days back.”

“It’s for using I-70. People who stop here always use I-70.”

I racked the slide on my shotgun, ejecting the loaded round which I grabbed and returned to the magazine. John had brought an 11-87P and pointed out that he didn’t

have a slide to rack but you could trust him, it was loaded. I'd broken the thumb lock on my holster when we left the room. John had done the same with his 1911.

"We aren't using I-70 so back off."

"Is there a problem here?"

"Are you the law?" John asked.

"I am."

"Explain to these people that we just passing through on our way to Sterling, Nebraska."

"Isn't Sterling in Colorado?"

"Used to be, yes."

"Marty, you and the boys leave them be. You were warned about stunts like this."

"Andy, they stayed in the motel and probably ate in the dining room. They took food out of our mouths."

"You eat in the dining room."

"Nope."

"Neither last night nor this morning?"

"Nope."

"Put up your guns and be on your way. I'll sit on 'em if I have to."

"You married officer?"

"Yeah, so what?"

"Kids?"

"Two."

"Grab one bag out of the truck and take it home with you. Your wife might appreciate it."

"What is it?"

"Long grain rice."

“Thanks. Don’t suppose you have any extra diesel?”

“Sold 3 drums in Jonesboro.”

“What did it go for?”

“Two thousand, two hundred and eighty six dollars.”

“Fourteen a gallon?”

“If that’s what it comes to. The customer made the offer. We accepted and it included the drums.”

“Even with drums running a hundred each, that’s pretty steep.”

“Are we done here?”

“Yes. Move along.”

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“I thought you said we weren’t taking I-70.”

“I lied. We’ll be home tonight.”

“Why didn’t we come this way when we came down?”

“Honestly? It just didn’t occur to me.”

“At least we have enough rice for a while.”

“When the missiles flew, we had about 3 tons combined. We ate a lot of rice. This should last much longer and will make a very good trade good. The three most important staples in Mexico are corn, beans and rice. They aren’t the three sisters which are corn, beans and squash.

Sara says the Aztecs core cuisine was corn, beans and peppers and the Mayans core cuisine was corn, squash, beans and peppers. The Spanish introduced rice, barley, livestock and additional spices. Chocolate was Mexican and the Aztecs sometimes used it as currency. We can grow all of those plus some traditional US fruits and vegetables.”

“Give any more thought to that half section across the road?”

“John, it would be a back breaker. We dumped all the extra ash over there.”

"I know Alan but it's probably the most fertile ground in the area. We should slowly incorporate manure and ash over the next 2-3 years and use it like I suggested earlier as a truck farm. The folks are more accepting now given the hard line you took early on."

"We'll see. We're probably going to need another tractor, a big one that can pull a 5 bottom plow. I could use the manure we generate this year and mix it with the ash somehow and turn the soil. If we disk it and plant a cover crop high in nitrogen we could turn it come spring and repeat the process. What do you think, 3 years?"

"At the most, but we should take a conservative approach and plan on three."

"I'm not going to jinx us but what's next?"

"A Mini ice age would be near the top of my list Alan. Between the short nuclear winter and the longer volcanic winter the temperatures are running about 6°F below average which is roughly 2°C. Centigrade is 100° between 32°F and 212°F. 100°C = 180°F so 1°C = 1.8°F. Therefore 6°F = 2.2°C."

"If that the case, why would the Gulf Stream sink?"

"Good question, it might not. It's heat not cold that causes that."

"We need to pull over and add fuel to the tanks. It might be a good time for a quick bite of lunch. Want some coffee? It won't take long."

"Yeah, I missed my morning cup."

We pulled into a rest area, filled the tanks, used the john, washed up and heated up a MH entree. The coffee was ready in 20 minutes and we took time to enjoy a cup or three. Packing everything but the coffee pot and two cups, we used the john again and headed west. Three and a half hours later, we were within five miles of home. John had his window cracked and he told me to pull up.

"Do you hear that?"

"Sounds like a Ma Deuce. Call the ranch and I'll get us there as fast as I can."

"John calling the ranch. John calling the ranch."

"Ranch here."

"SITREP."

"Fifteen to twenty. Armed with heavy weapons. Ma Deuce and one Mk-19. What's your 20?"

“Five, no, four minutes out. Recommendations?”

“Come in through Sterling and we’ll have them boxed. Say capabilities.”

“One fifty rifle, two 7.62 rifle, one full auto capable. Three LAWs and assorted grenades. Two shotguns and our .45s.”

“Copy. Barricade road just past corner to ranch. Recommend you use fifty and move up as circumstances permit. They have M113s. Can the LAWs take them?”

“10-4; so can the Raufoss. Turning now and stopping. Can you see us?”

“Rog. Looks like they have bolt on armor added.”

“Copy bolt on armor.”

The two vehicles were parked at an oblique angle and the passengers were behind the far side of the vehicles from the dome. The angles were all wrong but a few rounds of fifty might distract them allowing John and me to get closer. We divided the white smoke and frags. John took his rifle and I hung the SCAR across my back and carried the fifty. We were able to move to our left out into the field to improve our angle.

When we had a good location, we set up and opened up. The range was ~900 meters, a long shot for John but perfect for me. When the fifth man fell, one of them realized they were in a cross fire. Six remained behind the M113s concentrating on the Dome and the other six moved to the ditch and opened up on the two of us. I could see a party of four of ours moving around the buildings and begin heading down the lane.

I wasn’t the only one and three of the six switched their fire to our four. Our people immediately dropped to the ground and held their position briefly. Then they began belly crawling with their rifles cradled in their arms. I briefly swung my scope to them and saw Sara with the W-3 MAAWS and three rockets. When they were 700 yards out, Dean loaded the MAAWS and Sara fired, scoring a direct hit on the front M113 and it exploded.

They reloaded and fired again, hitting the tracks of the second M-113, but doing little other damage. With the opposition in disarray, John and I moved closer to about 200 meters. Sara sent her third round at the second M-113 and it, too, exploded. John and I switched to our 7.62s and started in on the remaining six. The ditch provided good cover and it took about 30 minutes to eliminate the last six.

“What’s with you Alan? Do you have a sign saying, ‘Shoot Me’? Check your left arm.”

“I’ll be a SOB, they got me again.”

“It’s not spurting.”

“Could you apply 2 ACS+ sponges and some of that trauma gauze?”

“Can do. Take off you jacket.”

“I can unbutton it but that’s it.”

“Close enough.”

“John to Dome.”

“Dome here.”

“Alan has been shot.”

“Again?”

“Flesh wound.”

“Got him in the head, huh?”

“Pick us up. We’re in the field 200 meters behind the M113s.”

“Copy.”

“Send a driver for the bob truck.”

“Copy.”

“Do you tape a target on yourself when you get into a gunfight?”

“Not intentionally. For two little holes with no arteries hit and no broken bone, this hurts all out of proportion to what it should.”

“Here, put this in your mouth and clamp down on it with your teeth.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to clean out the wound.”

The next thing I was aware of was being in bed with my arm bandaged. I decided I must have passed out. My arm was on fire and I called out to Mona.

“Take this and call me in the morning.”

“Ok Dr. Mona, what is it?”

“OxyContin, 10mg. It’s the extended release form and the only size tablet we have.”

“Addicting?”

“Yeah, but you won’t get enough to get addicted. You’ll get this one plus 2 tomorrow and one the day after. Then it’s acetaminophen. How much rice is in the truck? They’ve been unloading for over an hour.”

“Five tons less 50 pounds I gave to a cop in Kansas.”

“A bribe?”

“No he helped us out and I figured one good turn deserved another. There are 199 50 pound bags.”

“What did that cost?”

“Four ounces of gold and three drums of diesel. We negotiated a deal for five ounces of gold and two rolls of silver dimes. When I admitted we had extra diesel, he cut the price by an ounce of gold and the two rolls of dimes.”

“Milled rice or rough rice?”

“Milled, long grain.”

“I wonder how much you could get for an 8,000 gallon tanker.”

“Rice was \$50 a hundred weight. He allowed us \$2,286 for the three drums of diesel. That’s \$13.85 a gallon. Eight thousand times \$13.85 is almost \$111 thousand. Divide that by fifty and I think it’s 2,216 bags.”

“Get healed up quick. Dad and you are making another trip.”

My brain must have worked the problem after I dropped off. When I woke up, I knew the total was 55.4 tons of rice. Three trailer loads for one 8,000 gallon tanker of fuel. They could pull 3 empty trailers down, a semi with two empties and a second with an empty and the tanker. It would have to be Paul, Dean, Harry Jr., Bob and John. With two of the youngsters in a Hummer with a Ma Deuce.

I called out and Mona brought me an OxyContin and a glass of water. I asked for three extra strength acetaminophen instead. My arm did hurt a whole lot less. When it kicked in, I got up and asked her to wrap my arm in plastic so I could get a shower. She said to just shower and she’d change the bandage after.

Maybe I should have taken the OxyContin. I got cleaned up and dressed, except for my T-shirt and shirt. She bandaged the arm and I could tell it was a FMJ round. After I ate, I outlined what my head had come up with while I slept. She told me to get some rest and she'd take care of it. About 90 minutes later I heard two semis pulling out.

"They'll be back in a week. Dad said to tell you he had 4 drums of gas and 4 drums of diesel for the cop, gratis. They took three 53' trailers and a 9,000 gallon tanker of the 50-50 diesel and JP-8. He said there was a second mill."

"Oh right, Windmill Rice."

"I checked Encarta. Arkansas is the biggest or one of the biggest rice producing states. Dad had his money belt so he probably took some gold and silver. They can probably get enough rice to overload all three trailers by shopping around. They're also pulling a 1,000 gallon fuel trailer that Dad had at home with the Hummer to refuel their vehicles. The fuel trailer has a combination hitch."

"I'm going to get some more sleep and let breakfast digest."

"I'll be in the kitchen visiting with Mom."

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"One of these days my husband is going to get shot and not wake up from it. I've lost count. What does this make, three or four?"

"Only three. Each shoulder blade and his arm."

"Only? On top of that, he's beginning to believe that we're due for another disaster. Isn't a GTW and Yellowstone erupting enough?"

"Honey, we got lucky on that eruption. It was the smallest and now we're good for 600 thousand years. What does he think is going to happen?"

"He's not sure but Daddy keeps reminding him of Nibiru."

"Your Daddy is stuck on stupid. It didn't come on December 21, 2012 so it won't be coming. That's not to say that other asteroids won't strike. There are some with close earth approaches in the next few years. A few years back, NASA had listed 982 potentially hazardous asteroids and 65 potentially hazardous comets."

A week later, they returned with a near empty fuel trailer trailing the Hummer and 7,500 bags of rice. John said the number of bags was just short of 7,500 and the guy was so grateful, he rounded up. Arkansas Rice didn't have enough so the guy got what he was short from Windmill by trading them some of the fuel. Counting what old rice remained,

we now had a lot of rice. We loaded up all of our old rice and some from the first trip and went to Sterling on a selling trip. The price was a very reasonable at \$1.50 per pound.

We also took orders for beef, pork and chickens. Beef was 10 dollars a pound, pork 7 dollars a pound and chickens were only 6 dollars for fryers and 8 dollars for stewing hens. It didn't move well because we wouldn't barter for labor. The only things we'd barter for labor were grains and garden crops. You realize that if you eat most of the eggs, your flock of chickens doesn't really increase much, don't you?

Cold? Without a doubt. I can't make it to church every Sunday and, perhaps as a result, don't look fondly on turning the other cheek. I have the bullet scars to justify my beliefs, if only to myself. That would be akin to a cop appearing in court at the sentencing hearing and saying, "You know your honor you should give the kid a break because he came from a bad home. He only shot me three times and didn't kill me indicating his unfamiliarity with firearms." Right.

We greatly slowed our horse breeding program when we ran out of space in the barn. Reducing our beef breeding program followed shortly thereafter and we cut back to one liter of pigs per year. The only exception was our draft horse breeding program. We had four pair of oxen and four of each breed of draft horse mentioned earlier.

Clydesdales were pretty but a lot of work to keep them looking pretty. The Percherons and Shires were just work horses but the Belgians stole my heart. The Percherons have a touch of Arabian and are well muscled. They were war horses in the past. The Shires are huge horses and have the extra hair around the hoof like the Clydesdales. Belgians are the most numerous draft horses in the US.

We didn't have any of the fancies like Tennessee Walking Horse's or Morgan's. We did pick up two mares and two stallions of the Frisian breed. They had beautiful black coats and the mares were about 16 hands and the stallions 17. These were powerful horses and we were told they did well under harness or as riding horses. They were noted for a brisk, high-stepping trot. We had avoided gaited horses until now.

Our principle breed was the stock horse. Purebred American Quarter Horses of the stock type. You should be familiar with them; they're easily distinguished from the halter, racing and hunter types. This breed of horse was also called a working horse and a ranch horse although stock horse was the preferred name. They were especially noted for their ability to work cattle. Each breed we raised had something unique about it.

"I picked up a case of six bottles of this stuff. I think you'll like it."

"What is it?"

"Jack Daniels Single Barrel. It's not blended at all. The bottles are all from the same barrel. I tried it and liked it so I got each of us a 6 bottle case."

"I still have most of the stuff Mona had me stock up for you."

"No you don't. You only have one bottle of Canadian Club left; I wouldn't drink your last bottle."

"But we bought Canadian Club whisky, Maker's Mark Bourbon, Jack Daniels' Gentleman Jack, Johnny Walker Black, Bombay Sapphire Gin, Jose Cuervo 1800 and Grand Marnier for margaritas, and Absolute Vodka."

"Trust me; this is better than Gentleman Jack by a large measure. You might try a nip to ease the pain of getting shot again."

"More for my pride than for the pain, John. First it was you and then Mona. I'm not looking to get shot. It really hurts. Especially the first two times when it hit bone."

"This one healing up?"

"I should be able to lose the bandage in two more weeks. They don't make bulletproof sleeves for the Interceptor, do they?"

"They have a Deltoid Auxiliary Protection System, the Enhanced Side Ballistic Insert Carrier...we have those and the Back Extender. They all attach to the OTV we already have. We looked for the wrong things. I noticed one of the Jarheads had different body armor and asked him about it. He said it was the Improved Outer Tactical Vest and included all of the things I just mentioned. He said it was three pounds lighter, too."

"Fort Carson here we come."

"Give me a day to rest up."

"Any trouble on the trip?"

"Nope. Found the cop and gave him 8 drums of fuel. He became our constant companion. On the way back we gave him three more bags of rice. We won't have any trouble in Salina from now on. Those good ol' boys in Jonesboro allowed as we weren't half bad for a bunch of damn Yankees. That same bunch tried to stop us again until they saw the Hummer with the Ma Deuce. I told the cop where we got it."

"Did you explain about the Hummers, fuel trailers, ammo and weapons?"

"Told him the whole thing. I suspect they'll end up with a pair of similarly equipped Hummers and a pair of fuel trailers. Said he was a Ranger, 2nd of the 75th, and wouldn't have any problems once he located what they needed. I noticed a double 8 or 9,000 gallon tanker. I told him where to fill the trailers so he'll know where to fill a tanker too."

"Day after tomorrow ok?"

“Yeah but make it after 9.”

Our goal was specific; locate IOTVs for everyone on the ranch. That now included my new son-in-law, Scott who was the proud owner of a National Match M1A, Remington 11-87P and a Colt 1911 with a PPK in .380 as a backup. Sara made sure he had all the extras like LBE, magazines and so forth. He put his fancy day/night scope on the National Match and his HK-417 had a TA01B. She gave him some of the surplus 7.62 and some 168gr A-MAX Match for the NM. He also got an MP-5.

The cowboy guns were a different story. They disappeared for several hours and came back with the 1894 and 1895 Cowboys and three Colt SAAs. The gun leather was some of those cheap Mexican knockoffs. The rifle scabbards were on order from the guy in Sterling.

Scott was a hard worker and had little difficulty learning the various tasks on our ranch/farm. He even provided a new single wide taken from a dealer's lot somewhere. Harry and his sons helped with the leveling and connecting the pipes.

Before we left, we got all of Scott's sizes because he needed nearly a complete soldier suit. We took my pickup and the empty fuel trailer. It was a quick trip and we were there in two hours and ready to leave three hours later. We pulled in around 4:30pm.

John and I passed out the new armor and visited with Scott last. We had 4 sets of MultiCam, including wicking T-shirts and socks, cold weather gear and gloves, boots, regular socks, trousers, jackets and covers. We also had a pack in MultiCam. We had the materials to make up a BOB and got him one of those Marine Corps OKC-3S bayonets. Mona came dragging out another set of knives, a Gerber Mark II, Cold Steel San Mai Trail Master and Buck Folding Hunter.

“How many sets did you buy?”

“Eight. One set for you, one for me and two for each of our children. I figured they'd all be married by now. Dean met a nice young lady in Sterling so there's hope on that front. Paul hasn't decided on anyone.”

“He's dating?”

“If you can call it that. Never seems to be the same gal from one date to the next.”

“I thought that Dean would be the last to find someone.”

“I did too.”

“What's he looking for?”

“The Playmate of the month.”

“I may know the perfect gal. The two years younger than he is but otherwise fits the general criteria.”

“Who?”

“A young lady from Atwood named Sandra Collins.”

“Do tell.”

“Her father was a customer and a prepper. That’s how I know him, I built their shelter.”

“How are we going to do this?”

“What do you mean we, Kemo Sabe? I brought it up and I’ll arrange something. It might be a good time to check with the people who we built shelters for to see how they’re making it in the PAW. I’ll ask Paul to come along to cover my six.”

John handled the entire matter and they visited several of his customers. It seems that not all of them were sitting down to Christmas dinner back in ‘12 or heard about the volcanoes from the mysterious voice on the radio. I’ve taken to calling ‘him’ that for several reasons.

We had the election and the GOP won. The attack came between the election and the inauguration. That being the case, which one was it, if either. I knew Obama’s voice, having heard him speak a few times. I couldn’t say the same for the man who won the election. Whoever it was had never identified himself.

When John got back, he was grinning from ear to ear.

“Where’s Paul?”

“In Atwood. It only took one look. She’s even lovelier than I imagined with a fair complexion, blonde and figure better than her mothers who could have been a centerfold.”

“So why is Paul there?”

“Oh, she was the only survivor out of the family and was staying at home. I didn’t recognize her, but she knew me. Anyway, Paul is helping her get her possessions around and she’s moving here. We have to take the bob truck back down the day after tomorrow.”

“I’d better get Harry and his boys looking for two more singlewides.”

“The pipes are in so it’s just a matter of hooking them up. When Scott brought in that home, I heard him tell Jr. that they might just as well run pipes for three locations. Didn’t you know that?”

“No John, I didn’t. This is becoming like one of TOM’s trailer parks.”

“He had a point Alan. Manufactured housing is a quick and dirty solution and much easier than building several homes. Plus there’s the shelter if we get another tornado.”

They got one home that afternoon. The next morning while Jr. and Dean looked for a second, Harry and Bob leveled and connected the trailer. It was late in the day before Jr. and Dean returned with a 3 bedroom singlewide. They jockeyed it into position so they could level and hook it up the next day. Dean let us know that Sherry had accepted his proposal and they planned to marry in about a month.

“That’s really strange. All three of them latching on to someone whose first name begins with an ‘S’.”

“I guess that means it’s a good thing that the family in Atwood didn’t decide to name their daughter Janice.”

“No, really. Scott, Sherry and Sandra. It’s unusual to say the least.”

“It also means another trip to Fort Carson as soon as you can get their sizes.”

“I’m going along on this trip.”

“Why?”

“I want to meet the President.”

“Bad plan. Even if we went in before we went to the Fort shopping. I’ll admit I am curious just exactly who the person calling himself the President is. That’s no reason to run the risk.”

“He’s been locked up in that mountain since Christmas of ‘12. I’d bet he’d be happy to see a smiling face.”

“I can hear the Secret Service now, “Gun!”

“We’ll take the M1As and leave the shotguns in the truck.” (Right, a M1A isn’t a gun.)

About five weeks and two marriages later, we headed to the Springs. We followed the road up to the gate leading to the Mountain and it was standing open. We drove through and parked. John got his M21, me my Super Match and Mona her Loaded. There were no lights on in the tunnel and we wound up a flashlight before proceeding.

We finally got to the famous 25 ton blast doors to find them standing partially open. Strange, very strange. We entered carefully, fully expecting to be grabbed by the Secret Service. The place appeared empty and only a sole light showing. It was like a beacon beckoning us and we entered the building. The lighting was selectively shut down. Following the only lighted path, we entered what proved to be the 'Control Room' for want of a better term. There was one individual there, an Air Force Technical Sergeant.

"You finally came!"

"Who are you?"

"Technical Sergeant Russell Williams at your service."

"Your voice. I recognize it. You've been pretending to be the President."

"Guilty as charged. They didn't make it. Either Air Force One or the staff from Peterson. I shut the doors at that last moment and rode out the hit. I've been here ever since, keeping the minimal systems running. That's about to end, the fuel is almost nonexistent."

"So, Sgt. Williams, why the charade?"

"People have to have hope. It took me a long time to get the equipment working and the blast took out the antennas. Eventually, I got a system up and made that long broadcast. You know, the 'My Fellow Americans' speech. I had some incoming data but nothing outgoing. I passed along what I had."

"We can take you to Fort Carson where you can pick up a Hummer."

"Do you know where I can find fuel, equipment and so forth?"

"Yes, we've checked the Fort out. What do you need?"

"Some civilian clothes, an M4 and M9. Maybe some MREs. I just have to get home to Salina, Kansas. I have a brother there who is a cop, or was."

Coincidence? Not likely.

We walked back to the pickup and trailer and headed to the Fort. As we went from location to location he picked up what he needed. We took him to the motor pool and got him squared away with an M1038 HMMWV Cargo/Troop Carrier with Winch. We also got a fuel trailer and he got a full load of JP-8. He was just about to leave when our cop friend from Salina showed up.

"Bubba?"

“Tommy?”

So the cop was Russell’s brother and his name was Tommy. Bubba had gotten civies at the Post Exchange but chose to wear MultiCam when his brother put on a set. I guess we missed some or he got the MultiCam from the PX. We visited for a few minutes and went to fill our tank with JP-8.

We did pick up a few odds and ends to fill in for some of the things we’d used including the last of the M1022 and MK 211, more hand grenades and 40mm grenades, loose and belted plus more of the AP/APIT and so forth. We pretty much cleaned out clothing sales getting more than uniforms this time. We also got every last round of M118LR and Mk 262 Mod 1 ammo. It really wasn’t a lot.

John hadn’t understated Sandra’s breath taking beauty. Paul said it was love at first sight. His mother said, “Yes, after she turned to face him.” God earned an A+ in packaging. But then there was Sherry and she was the vision of The Four Season’s ‘Sherry’ and another A if not A+. The ladies all rated Scott as an A or A+ so our children did well in choosing mates, just as I had.

“So there’s not going to be a number three?”

“I didn’t say that Alan. You never know; there will be or there won’t be. Why are you counting anyway? It was a long spell between the war and Yellowstone. Then Yellowstone sort of petered out.”

“I only like surprises on my birthday and at Christmas.”

“Here’s a surprise for you. I predict you’ll be a grandfather several times over within a year.”

“You’re probably right. You noticed it didn’t take long for them to move from the house to the trailers.”

There was no federal recovery program of any shape or form. Before the country was the US, there were 13 colonial states. There were now around 30 states as a result of mergers and secessions. Eventually the states got together for a Continental Congress. Each state had one representative. Some guy from Lincoln represented Nebraska and the Convention was held in Columbia, Missouri. I understand they used the college facilities.

To the disappointment of some and with the approval of many, the old Constitution was the basis to a new, revised Constitution. Each of the Amendments was considered individually and made part of the Constitution. Ambiguities were eliminated. The 2nd Amendment, for example, was divided into two portions with the militia part being in the

Armed Forces Clause and the Right to Bear Arms in a separate clause with no other language.

The Commerce Clause was still included but would not serve as a basis for federal laws supposedly regulating interstate commerce like the Mann Act or the National Firearms Act. There were surprisingly few federal laws and most of them clarified a Clause in the Constitution.

Congress was still had two Senators per state and a representative for a certain number of people. There were term limits of 3 terms per Representative and 1 term per Senator with the maximum number of years in Congress was established at 12 in the Constitution. The primary duty of Congress was to prepare budgets and go home. A secondary duty of the Senate was to Advise and Consent. To encourage minimal time spent on federal business, they were only paid living expenses and these were limited. It was no longer an occupation.

When the representatives to that Convention got to comparing notes, they got a shock. There were only 19 strikes against the US. Some involved MIRVs, but only 19 launches had succeeded. It had to be China. Russia hadn't launched against us and we hadn't launched against Russia. Both countries were the products of occidental thinking. There was no information about what happened between Russia and China. One of the first missions for our new Secretary of State would be to establish communications with Russia.

That brings up another point. We had very few Secretaries. They were, as in the beginning, State, Treasury, Defense, Postmaster General and Attorney General. The Attorney General would not head an executive department. The US Marshal Service, Secret Service and US District Attorneys were part of the Attorney General's office.

Defense had two branches, Navy and Army. The Air Force and Army were sort of merged. There was an Under Secretary of the Air Force and an Under Secretary of the Army and they both reported to the Secretary of the Army. There was an Under Secretary of the Marine Corps and an Under Secretary of the Navy and they both reported to the Secretary of the Navy. It was the same, yet different. The Joint Chiefs included all six individuals. An even number was a bad thing but the Secretary of Defense was the tie breaker.

That was the state of the union at the present time and elections were scheduled for six months hence. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats had done a good job running the country before the war. With their greatly reduced role in running the country in the future it came down to voting conservative or liberal. There were more conservatives post war and post Yellowstone. No doubt because the influential survivors were preppers.

There are a large number of liberals to balance the scale. They were the people who survived on the dole and expected the government to provide for them. They had

learned in the ensuing years that there's no free lunch. Nonetheless, they wanted to restore that and more.

They wanted the National Healthcare that they'd briefly enjoyed, a restoration of Medicaid, food stamps and government supported low income housing. The cities needing rebuilding were a steady source of jobs. The liberals weren't willing to work those jobs in order to put food on the table, pay the rent or for medical care. Same ol', same ol'.

The outcome of the election wasn't known for several weeks. The paper ballots had to be hand counted, verified and certified. Next, the results had to be forwarded to the federal election commission. The new President, a Republican, was sworn in on January 20, 2020. The federal Senators and Representatives were sworn in later the same day.

The new President had only known three days before the Inauguration that he'd won. Both candidates, assuming they'd win, had cabinets lined up. In addition the new President had to find nine new Justices for the Supreme Court. His nominations for each position were waiting for the Senate before they were sworn in. The Senate began hearings the next day to interview the nominees. Ten days later, the President had his Cabinet and the Supreme Court was staffed.

Three weeks later the final version of the budget was submitted to both houses. Income tax still existed, as a flat rate tax of 7.5% at the federal level and at 2.5%, initially, at the state level. Taxpayer would pay a flat 10% of their net income to the feds and they'd distribute the 2.5% to the states within 30 days of receipt. April 15th was the filing deadline and extensions weren't granted. The corporate income tax was a flat 15%, 10% federal and 5% state with the same filing deadline. If you operated a business, you deducted out-of-the-pocket expense to determine net taxable income.

The budget process began once the tax returns had been tabulated and the amount the feds had to spend for the next year had been determined. The new Constitution specified a balanced budget. The new currency standard was gold and silver valued at \$2,000 and \$40 an ounce respectively. Eight coins existed, one-tenth, one-quarter, one-half and one ounce coins both in gold and silver. For smaller transactions, the old 90% silver coins could be used until additional bullion coins could be developed.

With Denver, San Francisco and Philadelphia being targets, all coins would be minted at West Point. The smallest junk silver coin was the dime valued at \$2.86, the quarter went for \$7.15 and the half for \$14.30. This led to different groupings of supplies to reflect the value of the various coins. For our part, we wrote down the value of all eleven coins as a reference carried it either in a wallet or purse.

Public transit was restored beginning with the trains using trucks only for local deliveries. If you had a running vehicle, you could produce bio-diesel or ethanol for fuel. Gasoline engines were being converted to ethanol only for the most part. A few hardy souls with the knowledge began adding wood gas generators in their trunks, etc., and ran

their vehicles on wood gas. It seemed that the older the vehicle was, the easier the conversion from gasoline.

We lost our supply of salvaged diesel and JP-8 and decided not to convert any gasoline powered vehicle. This changed our way of doing business. Those 320 acres across the road were enriched with manure and the soil turned several times over the course of two years. We planted cover crops and turned them over after we added the manure the following spring. We continued the process until we had a deep layer of loam suitable for crops. From then forward, we planted all 320 acres in rapeseed/canola.

We put in a medium sized biodiesel plant and bought the chemicals from the state of Nebraska. Once started, our average yield was 40,000 gallons of biodiesel per year. It was used to top off our tanks and the unused portion sold for one silver dime per gallon.

Ninety percent of the time, the PV panels produced enough electricity to keep the batteries charged. If the charge dropped below 80%, one generator kicked in and recharged the entire set of banks. May I remind you were had a second battery bank we could install and another 300 300-watt PV panels.

Our horse business picked up greatly when we had enough draft horses bred and trained to sell. The saddle horses were in great demand in these latter days and we were running our breeding program for them and the Frisians full bore. We couldn't quite produce enough feed and bought what we needed with the gold and silver we were getting from the crops, rice, fruit and vegetables we were selling.

Then, the other shoe dropped.

Would You Rather... Nine

The other shoe.

We were doing well on the ranch slash farm. We had a few near misses with tornadoes. None came close enough to our property to cause any damage. The attacks against the property were few and very far between. We used a school bus burning biodiesel to transport those with labor obligations, or seeking to work for food and silver, to and from the property.

Before our equipment was totally shot, we found horse and oxen drawn equipment from several museums and a large enclave of Amish. They taught us how to use and care for the equipment, for a fee in the form of food and silver. The days were long, the work was hard, but it was possible to farm two sections minus 15 acres. The additional 5 acres made up our expanded garden which was mostly devoted to root crops, peppers, tomatoes, celery, cucumbers, green beans and squash. I included potatoes, turnips, parsnips, carrots, radishes, onions and beets in my root crop category. We grew some cabbage and lettuce for salads and kraut.

We didn't grow anything in the garden unless a majority of those here preferred it so certain crops weren't grown. That included artichokes, broccoli, cauliflower, rhubarb and vegetables of that nature. Those among us that liked them, brought or traded with Sterling residents who grew them.

I'd better mention our grandchildren. John had been right; we had three within the first year. Rather than spacing their children out to two year intervals, our kids chose one year intervals and four children each. Thus when the shoe dropped we had twelve grandchildren with the oldest just short of five and the youngest closing on one.

Shoes come in boots, oxfords, loafers, and moccasins, among others. This wasn't the type of shoe I'm referring to. The shoe took the form of a comet that struck the Pacific Ocean miles from any land mass. However (don't you hate that word), it created a large tsunami that spread across the Pacific in all directions. So, instead of Cumbre Vieja sliding into the Atlantic and creating a mega tsunami in the Atlantic, a comet created a mega tsunami in the Pacific. It might have been one of the 65 NASA knew about or another entirely. It came out of the Kuiper belt, destination Earth.

It wasn't spotted until it was close to Earth and by then the US and Russia determined that they didn't have time to do more than duck and cover. There was enough warning, a few short weeks, for many of the Pacific Islanders to move to higher ground. Australians moved inland. The Comet was named Shoemaker-35 in honor of the late Carolyn Shoemaker.

Low lying islands across the Pacific were swept clean of plant and animal life. The North American continent was inundated with water, washing San Diego, Los Angeles, Santa

Barbara and so on into the ocean. We weren't immediately affected being on the east side of the Rockies.

The comet, when it hit, sent a tower of water skyward, larger than we could imagine. It didn't all fall straight down and due to the rotation of the Earth the west coast not only got the tsunami, but torrential rains as the seawater returned to earth. The seawater contaminated fresh water supplies and the word we got was that it would take months for the salty water to be flushed back into the Pacific.

We received some rain, more fresh than salty. The fields and garden got so muddy we had to sit back and let them dry on their own. The meter measuring the output of the PV panels indicated they were only receiving between 75% and 80% of the normal daytime sunlight. It was a month before the fields were dry enough and the sunlight returned to near 95%, paused, and began to drop.

We were well established as the largest producing ranch slash farm in the area. In order to maintain our position, we dug into our stores of beans, rice and corn meal. We provided the residents of Sterling with that and a limited amount of pork and beef at a slightly reduced price. We always did our best at staying out of the public eye avoiding the crime of profiteering.

Profiteering ranked right up there with murder and kidnapping. If anyone thought prisons of that past were bad, they'd be shocked by the modern prisons. Two meals a day, beans, rice and cornbread plus a breakfast of grits.

Corn was a very profitable crop. We had increased the size of our corn field in response to 160 acres. But, so did everyone else that farmed and we cut back to the original 80 acre field. It did leave us with a surplus of corn that we could grind into corn meal.

"Is it just me or has it been colder since that strike in the Pacific?"

"I noticed that Mona. Maybe we're just getting old."

"We are getting older. I don't feel like I'm old just yet, thank you very much. Mom said the same thing. Both she and Daddy have said it seems colder."

"I have noticed him dressing warmer. Everyone did for a while. Come to think of it, I've been wearing my drover's coat more often when working the stock. For a while I had the fleece lining in. When the sunshine returned to normal, I took it out because I was getting over heated."

"But you're still wearing the drover's coat?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"What would you normally be wearing this time of year?"

“My cotton duster. Oh, I see what you mean; the duster is a lot lighter than the drover’s coat. The drover is 16 ounce oilskin and the duster is 10 ounce cotton.”

The short term effect was a month of rainy weather. The long term effects might include the possibility of global cooling. The war, such as it was, had a small cooling effect. Yellowstone, again such as it was, had a slightly greater cooling effect. Neither had been unmanageable. The combined effect had caused an overall reduction of temperatures slightly. How would the third event affect us?

It didn’t take long to find out. We were harvesting the crops with snow on the ground. We got them all in, luckily. We had a few days of clear weather followed by a blizzard rivaling any in memory. The system moved slowly and deposited heavy wet snow. The snow couldn’t compete with the winds, which reached a brief high of 70mph with a sustained speed of about 40mph.

According to the US National Weather Service, winds of 35 mph or more and visibility of a quarter mile or less are conditions that, if they endure for three hours, define a blizzard. Blizzards can cause serious damage. The weight of snow can make buildings collapse. Crops freeze, and livestock can be killed. Snow can’t collapse most domes.

During the Second Millennium, the Northern Hemisphere, especially Europe and North America, experienced the Little Ice Age. There is speculation as to when it began. NASA says around 1550AD and ending 1880AD. In 1815, Mt. Tambora, an Indonesian volcano erupted causing 1816 to be ‘The Year Without a Summer’. At least we got Frankenstein out of the event. One of Shelly’s companions, Polidori, wrote ‘The Vampyre’. Stoker wrote ‘Dracula’ about 80 years later.

All that water in the air combined with the remaining smoke and dust particles from the war and the eruption. Some fell to earth; some remained airborne. The airborne particles reduced the sunlight reaching the surface explaining why the amount of sunlight began to slip. We were down to 85% and falling, and the weather was unusually cold. Sterling is located at 40.625430 (positive indicates N). What was the story Jerry wrote about 38°N? *Man It Is Cold Outside?* I think so.

Can’t claim, ‘This land is mine, God gave this land to me’. (Exodus Theme Lyrics) No sir, inherited 320, bought 320 and borrowed 640. Possession is 9 points of the law and a deed is the tenth. If it doesn’t start to warm up, we may have to move to New Mexico.

“Damn it’s cold.”

“Mona said June and you were feeling it. We got into a discussion and she pointed out that I’m wearing my Drover’s coat rather than my cotton duster. This time of year I can usually get by with the duster, but not this year. I was just wondering to myself if we needed to contemplate moving to New Mexico.”

“Why would you want to do that Alan?”

“Some of the stories talk about an east west line dividing the country along Interstate 70. Several stories in fact.”

“Jerry D Young, right?”

“Yep, the PTR-91 man.”

“Is he why you got a Go-Lock rather than a P-14?”

“Not really. I just liked the Glock better than the Para Ordnance pistol. There are P-14s among the handguns we collected from that dealer in Englewood. The Glock only holds one less cartridge and has a safer system in my opinion.”

“Their fine pistols but simply not to my taste. You were never in the military. I’ve seen you shoot and I’ve seen you in combat situations. Where did you get your tactical training?”

“Are you asking if I went to a school somewhere to learn when to duck?”

“You seem to have some experience. I assumed you had some training.”

“I have, OJT. I’ve been riding since I was knee high to a grasshopper. A person learns to gauge the animal they’re on so they don’t get thrown. That applies to life in general as far as I’m concerned.

“You know that old saw, ‘just because you’re paranoid, doesn’t mean they aren’t out to get you’? When we got into this whole survival deal, I read that at Frugal’s and made it a principle I live my life by. Do you remember those first ten guys? The last guy surrendered and I killed him anyway? He might have been able to swing that rifle down and get off a round that killed one of us. It’s a combination of common sense and paranoia.”

“We pulled in just when it ended.”

“Oh, right. The rule is if you attack us, you die. The plaque for the alternates is down in the ladies room.”

“Top Gun?”

“Yeah, Iceman; when they were discussing who was the best. So you’ve had no formal training, right?”

“Only the school of hard knocks. You have to win or you die. It’s a great motivator. I’m not saying that I wouldn’t be better off if I’d taken some training. United States Training

Center (formerly Blackwater Training Center) offers tactics and weapons training to military, government, and law enforcement agencies.

“USTC also offers several open-enrollment courses periodically throughout the year, from hand to hand combat to precision rifle marksmanship. They also offer courses in tactical and off road driving. I checked them out and not only was it expensive, I couldn’t spare the time.”

As luck would have it, it didn’t stay cold for very long. Three years later and we realized that it had been a weather anomaly caused by the comet. It sure hadn’t hurt to have all those mountain ranges between the Pacific coast and Sterling. Life resumed the new post war, post Yellowstone, post Comet normal. The word must have gotten out, we weren’t attacked again.

In time, first John and then June passed. Mona and I became great grandparents and some of the younger people moved off the ranch into Sterling. Things had gone full circle.

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